McMaster University
Review of the School of Graduate Studies

October 5-6, 2016

Members of the Review Team:

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Summary and Recommendations

There is much to commend in the operations of the McMaster School of Graduate Studies. Their role seems highly valued in areas such as support for new programs and periodic reviews, liaison with provincial authorities, and the facilitation of community life among graduate students. When considering the administrative effectiveness of SGS, it was difficult to differentiate the expressed concerns about the Mosaic system and its associated workflow challenges from the core work of SGS. We did hear, however, that significant problems in service and communications predated Mosaic implementation, and we offer several recommendations to address these.

More broadly, we encourage SGS to take a stronger role in graduate education leadership, functioning as a knowledge broker, an advocate, and a promoter of academic excellence, enabling a progressive vision for graduate education across the university.

The review team was asked to provide feedback on the “mandate and effectiveness of the SGS”. The Provost & Vice President Academic provided the following six questions to guide the review:

1. How effectively does the school manage its critical roles including recruitment and admissions, support for and monitoring of current graduate students, allocation of scholarships and other resources?
2. How well does the school interact with departments and Faculties as partners in the support of graduate education?
3. How effective is the school in the support of enrolment growth?
4. How effective is the school in the development of new programs and in the periodic appraisal of ongoing programs through the IQAP process?
5. Are there more effective models for enhancing the role of graduate studies that might work well at McMaster?
6. SGS has responsibility for both post-doctoral fellows and for undergraduate research. Is this the most effective place to support these activities?

These questions are addressed within the recommendations presented below; the recommendations are organized under the five themes discussed in the full report. Question 4 on the IQAP process is
not addressed, as we heard that the process is working effectively. We want to stress that the work of the SGS generally is valued and that there is great potential to enhance its role in support of graduate education at McMaster University.

Recommendations

Roles of the Graduate School

A. Through broad consultation with the McMaster community, develop a strategic plan for graduate education and the role of the SGS in ensuring quality, ongoing improvement and innovation in graduate education. We recommend that the strategic plan include focuses on interdisciplinarity and the enhancement of graduate supervision.

B. Facilitate and encourage a sense of community among graduate program directors, and develop activities that support them in their critical roles as educational leaders (beyond program administration).

C. Consider the appointment of a senior staff person, associate dean, and/or an advisory committee to assist the dean and associate deans with strategic, cross-campus, thinking and planning.

Service Orientation and Communication

D. Review SGS staffing levels, particularly in the admissions area, and undertake a significant reorganization of staff in the front counter and admissions/records area, giving the Associate Registrar accountability for both functions. Given the importance of timely admissions, we recommend the addition of a third member to the SGS admission/records team.

E. Develop and implement a plan to improve the effectiveness, responsiveness and service orientation of the front counter, admissions and records staff; provide regular performance feedback to staff and celebrate successes as the plan is implemented.

F. Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan, establishing clear guidelines for communications out to graduate programs, Faculty administrators, and students: who can/cannot send messages; what can be posted on the website; what type of messages should be sent and with what frequency. Ensure that these standards are communicated to administrators, faculty and students.

Note: Staff cannot achieve the recommendations relating to communications and culture while working at full (or greater than full) capacity. Time must be carved out of the day for conversations relating to service standards and culture change. This means that an injection of resources – whether one-time or base – is essential to executing these recommendations.

Student Recruitment and Admissions

G. The Dean of SGS should develop a graduate enrolment plan for the institution, whether as part of the strategic plan set out in Recommendation A or as a stand-alone document. This plan should identify areas for potential growth and clarify the role of SGS and other units in graduate recruitment.

H. Institute changes to the admissions system to eliminate paper-based admissions files (if possible) and improve documentation and training for graduate program staff to ensure that admissions files are complete before being sent to SGS.
I. Once more urgent matters have stabilized, consider delegating authority for issuing admission letters to the programs. This would need to be accompanied by periodic audits of the program admissions to ensure integrity of the process.

Administration of Graduate Student Funding

J. A Task Force with expertise from Finance, SGS and Mosaic implementation should be established to review current processes and recommend changes to reduce the number of ‘touches’ to student payments, eliminate the use of spreadsheets, and reduce times to payment. The SGS should more publicly report the source and allocation criteria of internal funding transferred to Faculties.

Student Life

K. The university should ensure that graduate students have access to mental health services on campus, as well as writing and career support.

L. If and when centralized career and writing services can be provided to graduate students, the SGS Life Team should consider formalizing and broadening the professional development support they provide for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Much of this can and should be done in collaboration with other support units on campus.

M. Using data from the 2016 CGPSS, evaluate student satisfaction with the level of services provided in the areas of writing support, career services and professional development. This should guide priorities for investment in these areas moving forward.

Postdoctoral Fellows and Undergraduate Research

N. Maintain central support for postdoctoral fellows in SGS, but transfer responsibility for Labour Market Assessment Impacts to Human Resources or the International Office, as appropriate.

O. Review the location of Undergraduate Research support in SGS; if it is to be maintained, new resources should accompany it.

Background

The review of McMaster University’s School of Graduate Studies (SGS) was conducted on site over the course of 2 days on October 5-6, 2016. The review team met with a number of senior leaders, graduate program staff administrators and directors and graduate students; the visit schedule can be found in Appendix A. Prior to the visit the review team received a number of background documents: SGS Self-Study, SGS Organizational Chart and a document comparing the staff complement and responsibilities of Graduate Student Life team at McMaster University with several other research-intensive North American universities. During the visit, we also were provided with copies of the Research Integrity Policy, the Copyright/Intellectual Property/Ownership of Student Work/Authorship document, the Supervisory Relationship document, samples of admission letters, samples of a Graduate Student Advisement report, graduate student enrolment by Faculty for Fall 2015 and application data by Faculty for Fall 2015 and 2016.

The review was conducted at the request of the Provost & Vice President, Academic, Dr. David Wilkinson. The review team was asked to provide feedback on the “mandate and effectiveness of the
Six questions were provided to guide the review; these are presented in the Summary and Recommendations section above and touched on throughout the report. Based on the main issues that arose in our interviews and observations, we structured the report as follows:

1. Roles of the Graduate School
2. Service Orientation and Communication
3. Student Recruitment and Admissions
4. Administration of Graduate Student Funding
5. Student Life
6. Postdoctoral Fellows and Undergraduate Research

This review of the School of Graduate Studies took place at a challenging time for the School, as it was, by necessity, expending enormous energy dealing with the adoption of the new enterprise platform, Mosaic. We heard wide praise for the Interim Dean in his role in managing and improving the very difficult situation that accompanied implementation of the new system. The review team struggled, however, to separate out the expressed concerns with the system from the perceptions of SGS itself. Related to this, the intense recent focus of SGS resources on system change management has undoubtedly detracted from its focus on broader issues. Given this substantial caveat, the review team made several observations that we hope the SGS and university might consider in its planning moving forward. We want to stress that there is great potential for the SGS to enhance its role in support of graduate education at McMaster University, and that the recommendations below are intended to assist in this.

Role of the Graduate School

In our conversations with faculty, staff and students, we did not hear a common view of the role of the SGS (or the potential role of a graduate school generally). For a majority, the School’s role was seen first and foremost as an administrative service centre. Although most appreciated the support provided, there were some who didn’t see value added to what the Faculties, in theory, could provide themselves. Others commented positively on the role SGS played in supporting student development and community, and a small number noted and appreciated the quality assurance role it played. In addition to these important roles, several individuals expressed a desire for the SGS to have a larger, more value-added, mission as a strategic leader in graduate education at McMaster University. We strongly concur.

Graduate education is one of the most important functions of the research university, and the graduate school is the central hub for that activity. Individual academic units often have graduate education as a core function and interest; however they also have other, sometimes competing, interests, including graduate student employment, income from enrolment, time and resources needed for undergraduate education and other focuses. The graduate school is the only unit that has as its sole function the support and improvement of graduate education, and it is the only one with a pan-university mandate. Thus, in addition to its administrative roles, we believe that the SGS should take a stronger role in graduate education leadership, functioning as a knowledge broker, an advocate, and a promoter of academic excellence, enabling a progressive vision for graduate education across the university.

Given the above-mentioned caveat, we saw numerous opportunities for SGS leadership within the university, which are elaborated below.
Support and enhancement of the graduate community

We noted that several programs had incorporated innovative practices or approaches to graduate education (e.g., the Engineering Faculty’s incorporation of student development plans and industrial PhDs; the UN-partnered program, Water Without Borders); but we didn’t have the sense that these were well known across the university, or that programs had the opportunity to learn about and discuss innovative educational practices as a community. Program directors from different Faculties generally seem not to have met each other. Other than administrative training, it was not apparent that directors received any professional development related to their role as educational leaders (e.g. on what makes a program outstanding, on meaningfully tracking of student progress, on dealing with difficult student-supervisor issues, etc). Given McMaster’s reputation as an educational innovator, we were surprised that there seemed little cross-university dialogue on where graduate education should be going in the 21st century, and were unaware of any strategic plan for graduate education. Conversations with program directors indicated that many understood their role to be narrow, focusing on BIUs, recruitment, and funding.

The subject of interdisciplinarity and its importance in the academy came up on numerous occasions. There was an interest in re-visiting Dr. Allison Sekuler’s paper on best practices related to interdisciplinary graduate education, and in making it more widely known. The interdisciplinary program leaders we spoke with also felt that there could be a tighter structure for and greater cohesion among the programs. They reported to a diversity of offices and felt that they had no real home; they also had little interaction with each other. They suggested that having a single individual with responsibility for interdisciplinary programs (an Associate Dean, for example) would improve matters, and could function as a champion for them and for interdisciplinarity more broadly within the university.

Graduate supervision

As a promoter of educational excellence, the graduate school should also have a special role around graduate supervision. The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most important determinants of quality in graduate research education; but it often is under-valued, under-assessed, and under-supported, and especially in the sciences, is an inherently conflicted endeavour. The SGS is to be commended for developing a document/contract to guide student-supervisor relationships, Getting the Supervisory Relationship Off to a Good Start. The document is an excellent resource for students and supervisors; however, we heard that it is optional and underused. We heard that program directors tended to rely on department heads or Faculty deans to help resolve difficult student-supervisor conflicts. The SGS is not considered a source of expertise or perhaps as having an interest in the issue and outcome. Students may see the office similarly.

We were happy to hear that the Associate Vice-President (Faculty) leads professional development activities for faculty around supervision, but were unaware of any focus on enhancing the general culture of supervision across campus, touching especially those who don’t participate in the workshops. Although we understand that the AVP (Faculty) engages the AVP & Dean of SGS in developing supervision workshops, we feel the mandate for promoting excellence in graduate supervision is best placed within the SGS. In addition to the existing supervision workshops, activities could include widely sharing best practices, creating guidelines for supervision assessment, and ensuring a strong focus on supervision in all aspects of faculty life and milestones (applicant
interviews, appointments, department meetings, merit assessments, etc). The President’s Award for Excellence in Graduate Supervision is adjudicated through the SGS; however, recipients are not highlighted on the SGS website, nor are there many graduate supervision resources on the website (or linked from it). The grad school is best positioned to have an intimate knowledge of both the problems and best practices of supervision across disciplines at the university. It should be highly engaged with external conversations around research pedagogy and practices, and can be a thought leader in this arena. Its visibility as a leader in enhancing graduate supervision also adds to its perceived function and worth within the university.

**Strategic vision for graduate education**

Although the co-appointment of an Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, within each Faculty seems to work well in many regards, the structure has the potential to exacerbate the siloing of disciplines and Faculties. It also has the potential to minimize the broader strategic focus of the office, and, due to the dual reporting lines, to weaken the role of the grad school in promoting the quality of education in an environment prone to other competing imperatives. (An example of this may be a Faculty erring on the side of supporting prominent faculty member over students in problematic situations.) We don’t necessarily recommend changes in the executive structure, as all forms have strengths and weaknesses, and we appreciate that the associate deans convene regularly to focus on common and larger issues. It is possible, however, that the structure is contributing to what we saw as a paucity of cross-campus conversations and vision, and constraints on the capacity of SGS to lead these conversations.

With the SGS Associate Deans reporting to both the AVP & Dean of SGS and the Dean of their home Faculty, the AVP & Dean of SGS is left as the only academic leader with a university-wide mandate relating to graduate education. We therefore recommend the appointment of a senior staff person and/or additional Associate Dean to assist the AVP & Dean with cross-campus strategic initiatives, or the establishment of an advisory group to work with the executive team in strategic thinking and planning. We also encourage regular or semi-regular meetings of program directors across disciplines, to provide feedback to the dean and associate deans on issues beyond those of administration, and to exchange ideas on and best practices in graduate education.

**Recommendations:**

A. Through broad consultation with the McMaster community, develop a strategic plan for graduate education and for the role of SGS in ensuring quality and ongoing improvement and innovation in graduate education. We recommend that the plan include a focus on interdisciplinarity and the enhancement of graduate supervision.

B. Facilitate and encourage a sense of community among graduate program directors, and develop activities that support them in their critical roles as educational leaders (beyond administration).

C. Consider the appointment of a senior staff person, associate dean, and/or an advisory committee to assist the dean and associate deans with strategic, cross-campus, thinking and planning.
Service Orientation & Communication

We were asked to comment in this report on how well SGS interacts with departments and Faculties as partners in the support of graduate education. Our conversations with various stakeholders indicated broad support for the existence of SGS, but frustration with the culture and responsiveness of SGS to the administrators and academic directors of graduate programs. There was similar frustration about a lack of, or organization of, communications from SGS.

We heard from many that the SGS staff are kind and often helpful. However, a clear and consistent message from a wide range of stakeholders – faculty members, students, and staff – was that the level of service provided by the SGS is inadequate. Program administrators and advisors in particular complained of telephones not being answered, messages and voice mails not being returned, and long line-ups at the cramped SGS front counter (one administrator said that ‘it feels like Fort Knox’). Although managerial staff in SGS appeared aware of the issue, other SGS staff members appeared unaware of or seemed to deny the basis of these concerns. These staff members otherwise appeared to be committed and professional in their approach; this speaks to the need for the unit’s leadership to clearly articulate service standards and behaviour expectations, as they may not have permeated the organization to date. Seemingly small matters have become major irritants, e.g. emails sent to generic email addresses receiving unsigned replies, making it impossible to follow up with an individual for clarification.

The apparent lack of responsiveness is not merely a function of culture within the organization; rather, it also reflects what appears to be persistent understaffing, particularly in the admissions area, further exacerbated by the demands of Mosaic implementation. We heard that admission system changes increased the workload of SGS staff, as well as program staff and that the SGS staff are “swamped all the time”.

The organizational structure of SGS may also be contributing to the inability to provide adequate levels and quality of service. The separation of admissions and student records staff functions makes it impossible to assign one staff member to be responsible for a group of graduate programs. Experience at other institutions suggests that graduate program administrators highly value having ‘their’ assigned officer in the SGS, who becomes their ‘go-to’ person for all admissions and records related questions. Similarly, having the front-office staff report to the Dean’s Executive Assistant creates a separation between that group and the admissions and records staff, with whom the front office team should work closely. Experience at other institutions suggests that undergraduate student employees are able to provide high quality front-counter service when they are appropriately integrated into the admissions and records team.

Communication problems in general were described in almost all of our meetings. In addition to concerns with the perceived lack of responsiveness, considerable frustration was expressed with the modes, frequency, and content of communications from the SGS. Communication with students, for example, was described as ‘disorganized’. Students reported that email messages from the SGS to grad program administrators were not always forwarded to them; they were unaware of opportunities to serve on committees; they were unsure of their role in Graduate Council; and notice of delayed payments or deadlines arrived too late. Students reported that they would prefer to receive the information from a single source, rather than both the SGS and their home program. The McMaster SGS is not alone in experiencing challenges relating to communications; many graduate
schools struggle with similar issues, particularly with respect to finding effective mechanisms for communication with students.

We heard that these issues of service culture and communication predated Mosaic implementation; but we appreciate that they were undoubtedly exacerbated by the stresses associated with it. We also understand that although there have been recent, significant, improvements (such as institution of Town Halls and posting of more information on the website), a continued, coordinated approach is required. We also conclude that the culture of the SGS administrative office generally is not appropriately service oriented. Immediate action should be taken to remedy this situation. (Some of these recommendations touch on issues discussed in greater detail elsewhere in the report)

**Recommendations:**

D. Review staffing levels, particularly in the admissions area, and undertake a significant reorganization of staff in the front counter and admissions/records area, giving the Associate Registrar accountability for both functions. Given the importance of timely admissions, we recommend the addition of a third member to the SGS admission team.

E. Develop and implement a plan to improve the effectiveness, responsiveness, and service orientation of the front counter, and admissions and records staff; provide regular performance feedback to staff and celebrate successes as the plan is implemented.

F. Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan, establishing clear guidelines for communications out to graduate programs, Faculty administrators, and students: who can/cannot send messages; what can be posted on the website; and what type of messages should be sent and with what frequency. Ensure that these standards are communicated to administrators, faculty and students.

Note: Staff cannot achieve the recommendations relating to Communications and Culture working when working at full (or greater than full) capacity. Time must be carved out of the day for conversations relating to service standards and culture change. This means that an injection of resources – whether one-time or base – is essential to executing these recommendations.

**Student Recruitment and Admissions**

We were asked to comment on the effectiveness of SGS in its role relating to recruitment and admissions, and the support of enrolment growth.

**Recruitment**

Increasing graduate student admissions is a high priority at McMaster University, as it is for many Canadian universities. The competition for domestic graduate students is particularly high among Ontario universities because of targeted funding provided by the provincial government. Ontario universities were allocated access to graduate funding on a competitive basis; like many of the large Ontario universities, McMaster continues to work toward using this allocation.

Recruitment of graduate students is a complex and multi-faceted undertaking. At many research universities, the role of the SGS in recruitment is not well defined. Responsibility tends to be distributed across graduate programs/line departments, with support from the undergraduate recruitment office or international office.
At a minimum, a SGS is expected to develop and maintain an inviting and informative Future Student webpage. The graduate school provides content expertise to this site and often consults closely with the university marketing team, which brings expertise in the digital space as well as marketing savvy. The McMaster SGS webpage is informative and well designed, and provides links to relevant graduate program information, as well as to the application for admission. A number of additional features would be helpful, including profiles of students and alumni talking about why they chose McMaster, their career success, and what they gained at McMaster; more accessible information about university life and resources, especially for international students; and webinars and other tools for engaging with prospective students.

Recruitment of graduate students – particularly the domestic students so highly valued in the Ontario system – is unlikely to take place at recruitment fairs. Much of the activity of recruitment now takes place in the digital space, with program and faculty-member websites, social media presence, and digital advertising all playing a growing role. If Schools of Graduate Studies are to play a role in recruitment, they must do so in cooperation with university marketing/communications teams and/or be resourced to develop expertise in web design and social media marketing. Communications support is needed not only in the School of Graduate Studies, but also in the Faculties and graduate programs, which must maintain high-quality webpages and engage in digital outreach activities appropriate to their discipline.

SGS may be better placed to play a role in helping graduate programs to increase their yield rates (i.e. convert admitted students to registered students). Regular reporting to programs on the number of applications, offers and acceptances (provided by the Office of Institutional Research & Analysis) can serve to motivate programs and strategically guide their recruitment efforts. Personalized contact from potential supervisors/graduate programs can play a role in increasing yield rate. Certainly, SGS could serve as a clearing house to disseminate best practices in recruitment, drawing on the expertise of programs experiencing success.

A key role for SGS would be to develop a medium-term enrolment plan, identifying areas for potential growth. Such an enrolment plan would equip the institution to consider whether current resource allocations are appropriate. This activity could be aligned with or a component of the strategic plan for graduate education suggested above.

**Admissions**

A school of graduate studies is expected to develop and maintain (in cooperation with IT) a functional application system. This will not bring in new students per se, but it will ensure that interested individuals apply. It is likely too early to comment on whether the Mosaic system will eventually be a recruitment-friendly application system. As programs experienced the system and processes in the past few years serious problems were noted which risked deterring potential students from seeking admission. In particular, we heard that applications were sometimes ‘stuck’ in the system, and that there were lengthy intervals between application and offers of admission (up to several weeks according to some programs). The delays in responsiveness of SGS staff described above included questions related to admissions. We understand that SGS admissions staff are overloaded with work and are well aware of these challenges.

The processing of graduate admissions in the SGS is the responsibility of two staff, along with some assistance from the Thesis Coordinator & Admissions Assistant. The demands on these staff for the
timely processing of admission recommendations, training program staff on admission procedures and evaluating and implementing changes to the admission system are excessive. Given the importance of timely admissions, the SGS staff can meet their goal of processing admission recommendations within 7-10 days (SGS Self-Study p. 7) only by adding a third permanent staff member to the team, as noted in recommendation D above.

Three further issues raised some questions around efficiencies. We were very surprised to hear that recommendations from programs are still submitted in paper copy, that approximately 50% of these are incomplete, and that the Associate Dean reviews all non-standard admission requests. At the very least, graduate program staff need further training and or resources to ensure that all requests have complete documentation. Lastly, if there are a large number of non-standard recommendations for admission (i.e. applicant does not meet program admission standards), the SGS could consider having a senior staff person approve applications with minimal or common deviances from the requirements, using set parameters.

Several Canadian research universities (include those of two of the reviewers) have delegated authority for regular admissions to the graduate programs themselves. This change has reduced duplication of effort, improved communication with future students, and increased the efficacy and satisfaction of program directors and administrators. Non-standard admissions (i.e. low GPA) continue to be reviewed by the central graduate school.

**Recommendations:**

G. The Dean of SGS should develop a graduate enrolment plan for the institution (whether as part of the strategic plan set out in Recommendation A, or as a stand-alone document). This plan should identify areas for potential growth and clarify the role of SGS and other units in graduate recruitment.

H. Institute changes to the admissions system to eliminate paper-based admissions files (if possible) and improve documentation and training for graduate program staff to ensure that admissions files are complete before being sent to SGS.

I. Once more urgent matters have stabilized, consider delegating authority for issuing admission letters to the programs. This would need to be accompanied by periodic audits of program admissions to ensure integrity of the process.

**Administration of Graduate Student Funding**

It was difficult to come to meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of graduate funding administration given the initial implementation of what appears to have been a highly problematic financial support module in Mosaic, a subsequent re-build of that, and changing processes within SGS.

We understand that most of the serious concerns expressed about student financial administration occurred during and after the transition of the Mosaic system. Students were sometimes paid extremely late, and there was significant confusion as to which unit was responsible for the various types of payment. We understand that most of these problems have been, or will be, rectified.

It is our understanding that SGS has functioned as a ‘middle-man’, collecting TAship, RAship and scholarship data from the programs, and then sending all employment and RAship information in
spreadsheets to HR for processing. There are obvious problems with that approach, and we understand that it is being rectified. In developing new processes, it will be essential for all involved to let go of traditional roles and give careful consideration to the mechanism that will be the most efficient and error-free.

Even though there have been frustrating problems over the past few years, we did hear from many that the administration of scholarships from within SGS is very well done, the team is very responsive, and it is much improved over past years. One concern that arose from a number of stakeholders, however, was a perceived lack of transparency with internal funding allocations. Faculty, administrators and students wish to know more about sources of funding, the Faculty allocation formula, and how program allocations are made within Faculties (not an SGS issue).

**Recommendations:**

J. A Task Force with expertise from Finance, SGS and Mosaic implementation should be established to review current processes and recommend changes to reduce the number of ‘touches’ to student payments, eliminate the use of spreadsheets, and reduce times to payment. It would be helpful if SGS could more publicly report the source and allocation criteria of internal funding.

**Student Life**

In addition to a growing awareness of academic development needs, consciousness has been widely raised around the need to prepare students for their diverse career trajectories. The graduate schools of many major Canadian research universities have taken on a role in providing supplementary professional development opportunities for graduate students. This was an area in which the former AVP & Dean played an active role in the provincial and national conversation.

The work of the Student Life team appears to be highly valued by students and faculty members. The size of the team and the resources available is adequate to deliver professional development training to a student body the size of McMaster’s. However, this relatively small team is being called on to replace the services that would otherwise be provided by a writing center and a career center, as well as delivering services relating to undergraduate research and postdoctoral researchers. These additional tasks detract from the core mission of the team and leave McMaster at risk of lagging behind other institutions.

The self-study did not give the review team a sense of the range of professional development opportunities provided, or the philosophy, oversight, or plan for graduate student or postdoctoral professional development. We also didn’t see a rationale or a framework for the offerings on the SGS website other than a categorization of offerings. According to the website, the vast majority of offerings are online (mostly from the MyGradSkills site). We urge the School to devote attention to the purpose and desired learning outcomes of this activity (and to articulate that), and to the pedagogical reasons for offering the opportunities in one format or the other, especially online vs. face-to-face. We believe there are sufficient staff in SGS to formalize and implement a more coherent approach to professional development if writing support and career services are delegated elsewhere.
A centralized career support office is best placed to offer direct ‘services’ to students – that is, assistance with résumé writing, job interview skills, job searches, linking with prospective employers, etc. It would be very difficult (and inefficient) to duplicate this expertise in SGS. That said, we do believe SGS has an important role to play in career development more broadly, and much can be accomplished through collaboration with a central Career Services unit.

Arguably, the same can be said for writing support. If there are units on campus that offer writing support, their expertise should be made available to graduate students. There are of course different (but overlapping) needs for graduate students relative to undergraduates in both writing support and career development. Most universities have found a way to serve both student groups effectively, through broadening central services’ ‘client’ base and collaboration of these units with the graduate school and other academic units.

The review team was very disturbed to learn not only that centralized career and writing services are not available centrally for graduate students, but neither are mental health services. While understanding that this is a result of a referendum in the prior academic year, we strongly urge the administration to work to find a suitable way to remedy this situation. The absence of mental health supports is of particular concern to graduate students.

**Recommendations:**

K. The university should make it an urgent priority to ensure graduate students’ access to mental health services on campus, as well as writing and career support.

L. If and when centralized career and writing services can be provided to graduate students, the SGS Student Life team should consider formalizing and broadening the professional development support they provide for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Much of this can and should be done in collaboration with other units on campus.

M. Using data from the 2016 CGPSS, evaluate student satisfaction with the level of services provided in the areas of writing support, career services and professional development. This should guide priorities for investment moving forward.

**Postdoctoral Fellows and Undergraduate Research**

We heard that the SGS is a good home for postdoctoral fellows. This is the arrangement in place at the majority of U15 institutions. The professional development needs of these trainees are similar to those of PhD students, so efficiencies can be realized through this administrative arrangement. We understood that the staff person focused on the needs of postdocs is spending increasing proportions of her time working on Labour Market Impact Assessments, which we believe is not an appropriate role for the Student Life team.

Locating undergraduate research in the SGS is an unusual arrangement, although one that has some merit. We were impressed with the strategic emphasis on using undergraduate research as a means of recruiting students to graduate education, and we applaud the innovative program that gave indigenous students an opportunity to engage in undergraduate research. We do not have strong opinions on the oversight location; but given the limited staffing described above, we would not advise maintaining responsibility for undergraduate research in SGS unless further resources were made available.
Recommendations:

N. Maintain the location of postdocs in SGS, but transfer responsibility for Labour Market Assessment Impacts to Human Resources or the International Office, as appropriate.
O. Review the location of Undergraduate Research support in SGS; if it is to be maintained, new resources should accompany it.