UNDERSTANDING ACCESSIBILITY IN GRADUATE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN CANADA

Recommendations of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce

Empanelled by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

PART 1: INCORPORATING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: STRENGTHEN THE STUDENT-SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend that efforts be undertaken to educate both students and supervisors about their rights, obligations and responsibilities, in particular those that relate to disability in the context of graduate education, in order to foster strong relationships and student success.

RECOMMENDATION 2: CLARIFY ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS

We recommend that efforts be undertaken to educate both students and supervisors about essential requirements in graduate education and within their field of study, and their interfaces with disability and accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION 3: DEVELOP ACCOMMODATION FRAMEWORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend that the accommodation framework and models in use for graduate settings be examined and improved to better ensure the success of graduate students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PROMOTE AWARENESS ABOUT DISCLOSURE IN THE GRADUATE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

We recommend efforts be undertaken to provide educational materials on disclosure and supports to service providers and students transitioning into graduate school. These supports are intended to ensure the full awareness of the nuances of disclosure in the graduate environment, and to familiarize students and faculty with their responsibilities under provincial and national legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPROVE PROCEDURES TO ACCESS ALTERNATIVE FORMAT MATERIALS

We recommend that academic departments and university libraries work together to determine ways to enhance the provision of alternative format materials to graduate students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 6: BUILD FLEXIBLE ACCOMMODATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

We recommend that policies and practices around accommodating graduate students with disabilities account for creativity and flexibility in accommodation planning and accomplishing graduate degree requirements, and that eligibility guidelines for scholarships, academic employment opportunities and other components of the graduate student environment take this creativity into account.

RECOMMENDATION 7: CLARIFY ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT POLICIES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

We recommend that steps be undertaken to clarify or develop policies and practices around disability, disclosure and accommodation in the academic employment setting, and that these be disseminated to students, union staff, faculty and departmental administrative staff, as appropriate.

PART 2: LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

RECOMMENDATION 8: DEVELOP FINANCIAL AID POLICIES TO HELP REMOVE BARRIERS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

We recommend the development of policies, practices and resources aimed at removing financial barriers to graduate education.

RECOMMENDATION 9: ESTABLISH NATIONAL FUNDING FOR DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend that national granting agencies (specifically, SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR) research and establish appropriate funding sources and mechanisms to provide centralized funding for researchers working on disability-related accommodations in graduate education.

RECOMMENDATION 10: REVIEW EXISTING POLICIES TO ENSURE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF EXISTING TRI-COUNCIL AND CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS FUNDING AND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

We recommend that funding agencies undertake reviews of their practices and policies to ensure accessibility and full inclusion of students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 11: DEVELOP MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS AND POLICIES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

We recommend that policies, practices and resources designed to support students with mental health disabilities be established.

RECOMMENDATION 12: ENCOURAGE UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend the adoption of a set of consensus "principles of success" arising from universal design concepts to foster the enhancement of the graduate student experience for students with disabilities on campus.

RECOMMENDATION 13: RECOGNIZE STUDENT SUCCESS

We recommend that institutions and relevant national associations consider methods by which their promotional campaigns about academic achievements in graduate studies might be designed to be inclusive of and enhance participation and success of students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 14: REMOVE BARRIERS TO THE POSTDOCTORAL EXPERIENCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

We recommend that appropriate steps be taken at the institutional, organizational and national levels to identify and implement solutions that would enhance access to and participation in postdoctorate positions for persons with disabilities.

PART 3: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

RECOMMENDATION 15: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We recommend that coordinated efforts be undertaken at the national and institutional levels to gather on an ongoing basis relevant demographic information about the population of graduate students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 16: ESTABLISH DATA COLLECTION METHODS TO RESEARCH THE EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We recommend that a multi-pronged and ongoing data collection effort be established by institutions and relevant provincial and/or national organizations.

Where possible, data collection could be integrated with existing procedures for the overall graduate student population.

RECOMMENDATION 17: PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF DATA

We recommend that a series of standards and practices be put in place to protect student anonymity and confidentiality in the analysis of large datasets relevant to the student experience of graduate students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 18: REMOVE BARRIERS TO CO- AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROGRAMMING IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend that efforts be undertaken to explore the interface between disability and co/extra-curricular programming.

RECOMMENDATION 19: IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING INTO GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend further research to identify best practices for transition planning for students with disabilities intending to pursue graduate education, in order to enhance existing supports.

RECOMMENDATION 20: IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING INTO THE LABOUR MARKET AFTER GRADUATION

We recommend further research to identify best practices for career and transition planning for students with disabilities transitioning out of their graduate programs, in order to enhance labour market outcomes and measures for students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 21: BETTER UNDERSTAND BARRIERS IN THE GRADUATE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

As part of future initiatives looking at the experience of graduate students with disabilities, we recommend further research on the issues and barriers faced by students with disabilities during the recruitment, application, interview and admissions cycle for graduate education.

RECOMMENDATION 22: IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE AND REMOTE LEARNING IN THE GRADUATE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

We recommend further research to identify student needs and best practices in online and remote learning for students with disabilities pursuing graduate education.

PART 4: NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATION 23: COLLABORATE ON FURTHER RESEARCH

We recommend the collaborative undertaking of further studies to assess the longitudinal experiences of students with disabilities in graduate education, and to ensure the successful implementation of policy and practice changes.

RECOMMENDATION 24: ESTABLISH A NATIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOCUSED ON GRADUATE EDUCATION

We recommend that the feasibility of establishing a national centre of excellence focused on the experience of graduate students with disabilities be examined.

RECOMMENDATION 25: DEVELOP RESOURCES

We recommend that resources supporting the initiatives fostered herein be developed.