

# KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## PART 4: NEXT STEPS

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS, RESOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

#### RATIONALE

This project represents but one component of the drive towards enriching the graduate student experience for people with disabilities. Although this study has offered some insight into the phenomena, there exist areas that would benefit from further exploration. Additional research would also contribute to existing literature on graduate education for students with disabilities and allow for the development of understanding from a much broader perspective. Moreover, the follow-up initiatives proposed by the project would serve both to build on its momentum and allow for deeper, multifaceted engagement with students with disabilities directly so as to better advocate for their needs.

#### RECOMMENDATION 23: COLLABORATE ON FURTHER RESEARCH

Recognizing that this project was the first to address issues and barriers faced by graduate students with disabilities on a large national scale in Canada, that a number of potential follow-on initiatives were suggested throughout the research phase, and that a number of additional questions remain outstanding, 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

Recognizing that there is an important need to ensure ongoing and effective dialogue around the student experience and success of graduate students with disabilities, and that the consortium of organizations involved in the Graduate Experience Project remain willing to be engaged in such dialogue, we recommend that the feasibility of establishing a national centre of excellence focused on the experience of graduate students with

disabilities be examined. The mandate of such a body, irrespective of term limitation, could include but is not limited to:

- a. Overseeing the development and provision the professional development resources outlined in the report and recommendations of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce;
- b. Monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce;
- c. Engaging with institutional and national agencies involved in demographics and data collection initiatives arising from the report and recommendations of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce, to ensure the appropriate management and analysis of this new information;
- d. Engaging with interested collaborators in developing and implementing future research projects, inclusive of those highlighted in the report and recommendations of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce; and
- e. Exploring the feasibility of establishing a national centre of excellence focused on the experience of graduate students with disabilities.

## RECOMMENDATION 25: DEVELOP RESOURCES

Recognizing that the policy and practice changes encouraged in this report require an underlying support system of professional development resources, workshops, toolkits and programming (Figure 34), we recommend that resources supporting the initiatives fostered herein be developed. Specifically, we recommend the creation of:

- a. Data analytic rubrics for application at the institutional and national levels;
- b. A database of scholarship, fellowship and financial aid opportunities and resources for graduate students with disabilities;
- c. Professional development opportunities for financial aid staff around the experiences of graduate students in general and graduate students with disabilities in particular;
- d. Resources to improve the financial fluency of students with disabilities transitioning from undergraduate to graduate education;
- e. Guidelines to help supervisors identify the essential requirements for trainees (i.e., students and postdoctoral fellows) successfully conducting research in their research environment;

- f. Resources to increase awareness of students, faculty and DSOs to the requirements of graduate study, both at the program and curriculum levels, and the interfaces between disability and graduate education;
- g. Resources around the impact of disability and accommodation issues on the student-supervisor relationship in graduate education;
- h. Guidelines to practicum supervisors to help them identify the essential requirements for trainees successfully conducting the practical components of their programs;
- i. A values and principles of essential requirements guidance framework for institutions and programs;
- j. A faculty guide on essential requirements in the context of disability;
- k. A best practices guide around accommodation and essential requirements for faculty and graduate programs, for dissemination to accrediting bodies and institutions;
- l. Practice guidelines for service professionals around the differences between graduate and undergraduate education, and the impact of these differences on the disclosure and accommodation processes;
- m. A transition toolkit for undergraduate students with disabilities interested in transitioning to graduate education to educate them on the differences between graduate and undergraduate education, as well as differences in the involvement of the DSO and other university offices;
- n. Resources to increase awareness of students, faculty and DSOs to the requirements of graduate study, and the interfaces between disability and graduate education;
- o. Resources to increase awareness of students with disabilities of the nuances of the student-supervisor relationship and the impact of early and ongoing conversations around disability issues with their supervisors;
- p. Professional development opportunities around the experiences of graduate students in general and graduate students with disabilities specifically for disability services staff;
- q. Best practices and principles around the accommodation of graduate students with disabilities in thesis-based graduate programs for use by DSOs and collaborating agencies;

- r. Training and resource materials around mental health, and the student-supervisor relationship;
- s. A toolkit for students with disabilities transitioning to graduate education to educate them on issues relevant to disclosure of mental health in the graduate setting;
- t. Professional development resources for faculty and staff around the distinctions between academic and employment accommodations and resources;
- u. A resource guide for students with disabilities and student leaders (i.e. teaching assistant union and students' association leaders) around accessing accommodations for academic employment; and
- v. Training and professional development resources on working with and accommodating students with disabilities for student life professionals, career centre staff, student leaders and other personnel delivering co-curricular programming to graduate students with disabilities.