

CONCLUSION

The National Taskforce on the Experience of Graduate Students with Disabilities undertook a nationwide multi-pronged research initiative to identify the barriers and challenges faced by graduate students with disabilities, to ground those issues and challenges firmly in the context of the graduate education and research enterprise landscapes, to evaluate the extension of those issues into the postdoctorate, and to evolve recommendations and solutions aimed at ameliorating the barriers and challenges we identified.

Throughout the course of our research, we were struck by the resonance and harmonization between the issues we were raising for discussion and those issues that were being discussed generally as part of ongoing discourse around the future of graduate education and research training, speaking to the need for the application of universal design principles to all aspects of graduate education and research training.

The outcomes of the project focused on the major myths and perceptions surrounding the academic experience of graduate students with disabilities, identified through our research efforts. These include issues surrounding expected vs. actual times to program completion; the disconnect between student training in academic integrity issues and institutional perceptions around the impact of accommodations on academic integrity; the ability to achieve the “necessary competencies” of graduate programs and disciplines; the nature and cost of academic accommodations and undue hardship; the differences between the accommodation requirements of undergraduate and graduate programs of study; and, the importance of faculty education in understanding the complexities of the interface between disability issues and graduate education.

Major themes included a renewed appreciation for the complexity of the barriers faced by trainees with disabilities within the research enterprise; the critical need for appropriate resources and frameworks that can be implemented at an institutional level to enhance the participation and success of trainees with disabilities; and the national and international context of disability issues within the research enterprise, as well as the importance of ongoing data gathering and advocacy approaches in driving the inclusion, participation and success of postdoctoral scholars and other trainees in the research enterprise. Finally, of note was the observation that, while students with disabilities faced complex challenges to their success within graduate education, many issues were at their root matters of the philosophy of graduate education, as informed by the disability context.

The project's findings translate into key messages and resources that institutions and research trainees with disabilities may apply to enhance the inclusion, participation and success of this population within the research enterprise. First among these messages is the central importance of the need for collaboration among all stakeholders

in the addressing and amelioration of barriers faced by graduate students with disabilities (Figure 35).

The findings from this unique first-in-class, multi-stakeholder research effort into the issues and barriers faced by graduate students with disabilities in Canada were used to evolve a series of policy, practice and professional development recommendations with three broad themes: (1) Increasing our knowledge of students with disabilities in graduate education; (2) Leveling the playing field and providing equal opportunities to graduate students with disabilities; and (3) Increasing the effectiveness of academic and co-curricular accommodations in the graduate environment.

These findings and recommendations will lead to changes in professional development and continuing education for faculty and service providers; alter the nature of student preparation for graduate education; significantly impact institutional, provincial and national policy and practice; and enhance the potential for success of graduate students with disabilities in their programs of study and chosen careers.