



Canadian Journal of Higher Education
Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur
Volume 44, No. 3, 2014, pages i-ix

Introduction from the Special Issue Editors

Preparing Graduate Students for a Changing World of Work

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This special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* represents the growing recognition of changes in the career paths and trajectories of graduate students, as well as the deepening interest in the support and development of professional knowledge and skills in advanced degree holders. Geographer Andrew Ross described today's "geographies of livelihood" in terms of the changing demands of work and employment in a globalized knowledge economy.

Today's livelihoods are pursued on economic ground that shifts rapidly underfoot, and many of our old assumptions about how people can make a living are outdated. No one, not even those in the traditional professions, can expect a fixed pattern of employment in the course of their lifetime any longer, and they are under more and more pressure to anticipate, and prepare for, a future in which they still will be able to compete in a changing marketplace (Ross, 2009, p.2).

These changing conditions of work are also true for doctoral students, many of whom pursue an advanced degree in hopes of obtaining a position as a faculty member in higher education. Doctoral students, however, find a journey that is difficult and long, with side trips into contingent employment or explorations of alternative career options as they discover the increasing challenge of obtaining academic positions. The question of how universities prepare their doctoral students for these shifting career trajectories presents a timely and pressing challenge, with multiple disciplines now taking up the question of program reform (Tamburri, 2013).

Over the past decade, interest in this topic has been building at both the national and regional levels. The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) supported a conference on innovation in graduate education in 2005 and the Tri-Council national research agencies (NSERC¹, SSHRC², CIHR³) together with CAGS and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) sponsored a gathering of academics and professionals in Ottawa in 2007 to discuss the development of professional skills in graduate students. In 2011, an international conference entitled NAVIGATING your PATH⁴: Exploring and supporting teaching assistant and graduate student development, was funded by SSHRC and held at the University of Toronto, and in 2012, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) hosted a symposium on graduate students entering the workforce (academic or otherwise). As these and other conference examples indicate that the need to prepare graduate students for a dynamic and changing labour market is an issue of national concern. Graduate student preparation for changing career paths is, of course, a reflection of larger national questions around postsecondary education, skills development, and the labour market. Our call for proposals for this issue sought contributions that theorized the problem of graduate student development, reports on empirical research, and/or illuminated comparative models for work in the Canadian context to inform the growing field of graduate student support in Canada. The goal of this special issue is to contribute to the global conversation about graduate student education reform by deepening the conversation on this issue across Canada.

Growing Concern for Reform in Graduate Education

Traditionally, the literature on preparing graduate students for their future careers concentrated on preparing them for the professoriate, by socializing them for faculty roles and building their skills in teaching and research (Katz & Hartnett, 1976; Weiss, 1981; Marincovich, Prostko, & Stout, 1998). However, the conversation about graduate student development is changing and the debate about professional development in higher education institutions across Canada increasingly addresses the kinds of skills that graduate students need to navigate changing labour markets. This has been necessary in a labour market where fewer than 25% of PhD students will end up in full-time tenure-stream research and teaching positions; given this reality, a shift in the focus of graduate school development has been necessary (Sekuler, Crow, & Annan, 2013). Most recent literature on preparing graduate students for the labour market has responded to three dynamic processes: the changing labour market, the changing government mandate, and the changing purpose of graduate school.

The uncertain academic labour market is cause for concern amongst faculty, administrators, and most pressingly, amongst students. In the United States, the percentage of adjunct faculty has grown from 20% in the 1970s to over 50% in 2014 (Goldstene, 2014) and, according to the American Association of University Professors (2014), “non-tenure track positions now account for 68% of all faculty appointments in American higher education.” This is a figure that does not take into account the teaching that is done by graduate students (Goldstene, 2014). Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about the low range of pay that adjunct professors can expect—some U.S. institutions of higher education pay faculty as little as \$900 per course—and as a result, many adjunct faculty depend on social assistance, such as food stamps, to meet their basic needs (Williams & Newman,

2013). In the UK, the conversation centres around changes in institutional spending—increasing investment in administration and decreasing funds allocated to teaching—and the impact that this trend has on the academy (Ginsberg, 2011). Adjunct faculty make up 76% of the academic workforce in the United Kingdom (Meranze & Newfield, 2013). There is a growing gap between tenure-track and adjunct faculty, so much so that adjunct faculty perceive themselves as the “fast food workers of the academy” (Hoff, 2014) and the “tenure-track’s untouchables” (Meranze & Newfield, 2013). Within Canada, adjunct faculty are also referred to as sessional, contract, or limited-term appointment faculty. It is estimated that more than half of all undergraduates are taught by contract faculty in Canada, up from 38% in 2012 and that less than 4 cents for every university dollar goes towards the salaries of those contract faculty (Basen, 2014).

Despite the reality of a decrease in full-time academic jobs and the increase of contingent work within the academy, enrolment in graduate school across Canada has increased. Observing this trend, a number of people have argued that graduate school is becoming a labour market holding tank (Basen, 2014; Maldonado, Wiggers, & Arnold, 2013). Teitelbaum (2014), in his recently published book on the academic production process in the United States points to the fact that the production of graduate students is a function of research grant availability rather than the demand for PhD graduates both within and outside the academy. He suggests that the increase in graduate student enrolment is because over time, graduate students have become the ‘go-to’ form of scholarly labour that university labs require in order to function. This trend can be translated easily into the Canadian context and the conversation about the employment of graduate students in both research and teaching in Canadian institutions (Usher, 2014). Teitelbaum (2014) also suggests that, because there is a growing awareness among domestic students that graduate school does not lead to guaranteed employment, institutions have had to reach out to an increasing number of international students, particularly from Asia. In Canada, immigration reform has limited the possibility for many different classes of immigrants; however, through the Federal Skilled Worker program, there has been a marked increase in the immigration of PhD students for the all of the science disciplines (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014).

Whereas two decades ago, most PhD students could anticipate finding an academic position upon graduation, today’s reality is that only a small percentage of students who graduate with a PhD will end up in a full time tenure track position. This has led to a changing purpose of graduate school, more prevalent in some disciplines than others. The factors contributing to the current state of the academic market are: cuts in funding, the end of mandatory retirement, increased class sizes, more courses taught online, more contract positions, a postdoctoral fellowship (or several) increasingly required, and an increased intake in doctoral students. Enrolment in doctoral programs in Canada has almost doubled in the past 10 years (Maldonado et al., 2013), and most students who enter a PhD program, do so with the goal of attaining an academic position (CBC, 2013). In fact, participants in the 2013 HECQO report, *Beyond Labs and Libraries: Career Pathways for Doctoral Students*, noted that when they began their degree, they were not aware of issues related to employment upon completion and how the academic market has significantly changed over the past 20 years (Sekuler et al., 2013). This changing landscape within academia and for graduate student employment following graduation, necessi-

tates a reform in the way that graduate students are prepared for the labour market and a shift in the perception both within and outside the academy, of what success after graduate school would look like.

Over the last decade, many universities in Canada and the United States have expanded their centres for teaching and learning to include training and development for graduate students. This support is often directed at graduate students' roles as teaching assistants (TAs), with emphasis on the role of TAs in supporting student learning at their institutions. In the 2013 HEQCO study mentioned above, participants indicated that they needed more experience teaching—not just assisting in the process—and more support developing their pedagogical skills (Sekuler et al., 2013). Participants felt that their lack of teaching experience made them less competitive in the academic market. Graduate students in that study wanted departments to support and encourage involvement in teaching programs and courses, and stressed how important those programs were in their development. There is still a tension within the academy between the perceived importance of research versus teaching. Faculty and departments will often cite time to completion as a problem currently associated with the PhD, which inhibits recommending professional development, such as higher education teaching credentialing. However, when graduate students are surveyed as to reasons why their degree was delayed, they cite family or personal, financial, distance from campus, mental health (including stress) issues, or professional responsibilities, but not professional development. Research shows that integration into the academic community and a strong social network provides students the support they need to successfully complete (Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001).

The Papers

The papers in this volume focus on the changing academic job market and are divided into three different categories, based on the type of professional development support for graduate students. The three categories are teaching development, professional skills, and curriculum reform. Each of these papers contributes to the dialogue about the changing world of work for graduate students by suggesting possible approaches to graduate student development. They do this from the perspective of contributing to training higher education teachers, as in the two cases explored in Kenny, Watson, and Watton's paper "Exploring the Context of Canadian Graduate Student Teaching Certificates in University Teaching" and Aspenlieder and Vander Kloet's paper, "Listen Up! What a Graduate Student Hears about University Teaching." Skills development is explored by two articles: Venkatashtash et al.'s paper "Development, Implementation and Evaluation of a Professional Skills Development Program: The Case of Concordia's GradProSkills" and Porter and Phelps' paper, "Beyond Skills: An Integrative Approach to Graduate Student Preparation for Diverse Career Objectives and Outcomes." Two further articles focus on providing general support and development in different contexts as in the cases presented through Levkoe, Brail, and Daniere's paper "Engaged Pedagogy and Transformative Learning in Graduate Education: A Service Learning Case Study" and Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, and Meadows' paper "Developing the Intercultural Competence of Graduate Students."

Teaching Training

The first paper, “Exploring the Context of Canadian Graduate Student Teaching Certificates in University Teaching” (Kenny, Watson, & Watton) examines graduate student teaching certificate programs at thirteen Canadian Universities, and presents a discussion of program structures and practices. The findings provide an overview of the current state of graduate teaching certificate programs in Canada, and help to inform the continued evolution of graduate student teaching these certificate programs. They suggest that teaching certificates have the potential and need to play an important role in supporting graduate student development for their future careers in both the academy and in other professional careers. Investment in teaching certificate programs is especially pertinent in response to the issue of increased graduate school enrolment across Canada and to the growing concern about the transferability of skills into other career trajectories.

The second paper, “Listen Up! What a Graduate Student Hears about University Teaching” (Apenlieder & Vander Kloet) takes up the question of graduate student education and employment through a discourse analysis of course outlines for graduate courses on university teaching and popular and academic press articles on graduate education and employment. The authors’ research focuses on the (re)circulation of the discourses of crisis and responsibility, addressing the questions “What do graduate students hear about their education, their career prospects and their responsibilities?” and “How does work in educational development contribute to these conversations?” Two key themes emerged from their findings: the privileging of practice over theory and the desire to assign responsibility how to resolve—and who should resolve—the crisis of graduate education and employment. This contributes to the conversation about what is possible through graduate student development reform. In examining the incongruity in what graduate students may hear in discourses of responsibility and employability in higher education, Apenlieder and Vander Kloet invite us to begin asking “broader questions not just about how this crisis came about, but also about what we imagine and hope for of the university in the future” (Fullick, 2014).

Skills Development

The third paper, “Development, Implementation and Evaluation of a Professional Skills Development Program: The Case of Concordia’s GradProSkills” (Venkatash, Rabah, Lamoureux-Scholes, Pelczer, Urbaniak, & Martin) presents a case study of the GradProSkills program, a community-engaged initiative that draws from external service providers to develop and deliver professional development events for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. This contributes to the conversation about how to increase the level of engagement between researchers and practitioners in the field of graduate education. When this happens, the authors suggest, the quality of professional development training will improve.

The fourth paper, “Beyond Skills: An Integrative Approach to Graduate Student Preparation for Diverse Career Objectives and Outcomes.” (Porter & Phelps) critiques the framing of the “transferable skills” issue within the context of the university and graduate student development. By utilizing an asset model rather than deficit model for evaluating graduate student competencies, they propose an integrated approach where all steps of

the graduate student journey are viewed as building blocks to developing competencies that can be applied to diverse careers both inside and outside of the academy. They illustrate this through the cases of two students, discuss policy ramifications and the substantial challenges to the realization of transferable skills presented by a highly competitive research environment and established ways of assessing success in faculty and students.

Support and Development in Differing Contexts

The fifth paper in this issue, “Disrupting Conventions and Building Engaged Citizens: Service Learning in Graduate Education” (Levkoe, Brail, & Daniere) begins with the notion of service learning as a form of engaged pedagogy, and explores its ability to disrupt notions related to the “professional turn” in higher education and contribute more to transformative learning. The authors focus their argument on an assessment and analysis of a graduate-level course with a service-learning component. The authors argue that skill development through service learning is fertile ground for developing transferable skills such as moving from knowledge to ideas and then into action, by developing higher order reasoning and critical thinking. Their research contributes to the larger conversation about graduate students and skill development through the lens of engaged pedagogy.

The sixth and final paper in this issue “Developing the Intercultural Competence of Graduate Students” (Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows) explores how teaching development programs for graduate students have the potential to facilitate the growth in intercultural competence and prepare them for communicating effectively in the global workplace after graduation. The authors examine this premise through the lens of Intercultural Teaching Competence (ITC) and discuss the findings of a qualitative study on the impact of teaching development programs enhanced with intercultural communication components. Their discussion contributes to the discourse on skill development and the preparation of culturally diverse graduate students for both the Canadian and international labour market. Participants in their study demonstrated that the program contributed to their labour skill development as graduate students and they were also able to transfer the skills learned to other areas of graduate study, such as the use of effective intercultural communication strategies when interacting with globally diverse peers and faculty supervisors.

Conclusion

There are many stakeholders in the broader discussion of graduate student development, including graduate students, higher education administrators, faculty and staff, student services, educational developers in teaching and learning centres, and employers. A chief aim of organizing this special issue is to encourage further discussion and debate between and among these stakeholders concerning the future landscape of graduate student development. Already the question of institutional responsibility and accountability echoes across these debates. Who is responsible for these reforms and how best should they be implemented? The selection of papers in this special issue highlights emerging issues in graduate education and explores some successful strategies that we feel can inform support for students within the Canadian higher education system. It is our hope that this publication will serve to stimulate further research and development of program

models connected to the changing contexts and realities within higher education. The discourse regarding graduate student development is one that we hope will continue at a national level, and include some of the themes identified in this issue. 🍁

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Endnotes

1. Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada
2. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
3. Canadian Institutes of Health Research
4. The acronym PATH (Professional, Academic, Teaching, Holistic) provided a guiding vision for the conference and pointed to different areas of graduate student development.

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