

External Review of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

University of Alberta

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CHERYL MISAK

University Professor and Professor
of Philosophy Former Vice-
President and Provost

FAHIM QUADIR

Vice-Provost and Dean,
School of Graduate Studies &
Postdoctoral Affairs Professor of
Global Development Studies

ROBIN YATES

Vice-Provost and Dean Faculty
of Graduate Studies Professor
of Immunology

University of Toronto

Queen's University

University of Calgary

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Introduction

Thank you for inviting us to undertake this important external review of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta (FGSR, UofA). We received terms of reference and related documentation, had two virtual meetings prior to the site visit, and spent three days in Edmonton, meeting with a wide range of individuals, including faculty supervisors, the Graduate Student Association, graduate administrators, students, senior administrators, and FGSR staff and administrators. The terms of reference for our review and a complete list of our meetings are appended to this report.

We quickly came to realize there was much unhappiness with FGSR and that it is not living up to expectations. FGSR is widely perceived to be a process-centric, overly bureaucratic unit, with a focus on gatekeeping or the enforcement of rules and regulations. By the end of our visit, we were convinced that there was considerable goodwill and creativity amongst the FGSR staff and our conclusion was that there is a vital and positive role for a reformed FGSR. Many of our recommendations will be about rethinking its mission and processes and rebuilding trust in the unit.

This review occurs at a difficult time at the University of Alberta, with the provincial government imposing massive budget cuts on the post-secondary sector. In response to those budget reductions, the University has been radically restructured into three colleges along the lines of the tri-councils (with three remaining stand-alone Faculties, two of which have small graduate programs). We have taken the budgetary context and the UofA's response to it into consideration in this report.

Some of the problems with FGSR, however, are common to centralized faculties of graduate studies and have caused many North American universities to re-envision their role. Internally, these centralized units must justify their relevance and value to the wider institution. Externally, the context is rapidly changing. Many research intensive universities in Canada have been expanding the number of graduate students and programs to meet societal needs. The economic and job environment into which graduate students will enter is very different from what it was a decade ago. Our report recommends a re-envisioning for the UofA's FGSR, in line with what has been done successfully elsewhere.

We were open to considering the very existence of FGSR. It is clear that there has been a contentious discussion on campus about whether it should be disbanded and its functions distributed to other entities. Our conclusion was that it is best to retain and radically reform FGSR, with the reforms aimed at supporting graduate students and post-doctoral researchers and streamlining its processes. We advise integrating (not wholesale transferring) the essential jobs of FGSR with the local units—departments, faculties, and colleges.

To be clear, the objective of these reforms should not be limited to mere catch-up with similar units in North America, but to make FGSR a leader in graduate student and post-doctoral practices, ideals, and values.

A. Mission and Vision

There appears to be a great deal of confusion within FGSR and the broader university, as to its mission and mandate.

A centralized graduate faculty can focus either on gatekeeping control and oversight of graduate administration or on providing value through support, advocacy, and innovation in graduate programming. Throughout our consultations, we noted many efforts in the latter domain. But the general direction of FGSR tends towards oversight and control. This puts the UofA some years behind in envisioning its faculty of graduate studies as a genuinely service-oriented entity with a focus on providing leadership in graduate education and postdoctoral training.

The FGSR team genuinely and passionately cares about graduate students and post-doctoral researchers, and their experience at the UofA. However, the students we spoke to have concerns about whether, for instance, FGSR is a place where they can take their problems with their supervisors or instructors. We heard unsettling stories of students encountering obstacles when they reached out to FGSR. While there is a structure in FGSR and a commitment amongst the staff to be of service to students, it seems not to be working or effectively communicated.

It was also quickly apparent that supervisors, administrators, and leaders did not feel like FGSR considered their needs. Indeed, the prevailing risk-elimination approach, rationalized to protect the worst-case scenario, frustrates academic and administrative colleagues in the graduate education community and disadvantages the average graduate student and applicant. While well-intended to avoid the rare catastrophic student cases through restrictions and oversight, the process inflicts a “death by 860 cuts” to a positive graduate student and graduate faculty experience.

B. Organization

Centralization versus Decentralization: The role of FGSR in the New UofA Structure

A very few of those we consulted expressed the desire that FGSR simply “dissolve and go away” or for “power” (the responsibilities and authority of FGSR) to be distributed to the various departments, faculties, colleges, or the Office of the Registrar, with the exception of minimal tasks such as GPA calculation and document gathering.

But even the most critical members of the UofA community see the need for a centralized graduate and post-doctoral unit to effectively deliver a number of important things: lead University policy development with respect to graduate students and post-doctoral researchers; provide support for the development of new programs; set minimum academic standards for admissions and credentialing; administer common exam standards; adjudicate and administer competitive

scholarships; manage the enrolment status of students; act as a neutral arbitrator when conflicts arise (for instance, between students and supervisors); provide a broad range of professional development activities; provide ethics and equity and diversity training; lead cohesive and unified advocacy for post-graduate education, research, and training, and more.

That is, there is a broad-based pan-university consensus about the importance of FGSR that mirrors the importance of graduate students and post-doctoral researchers. While some fragmentation of responsibilities is inevitable and desirable, given the different needs of different disciplines, some one unit must be responsible for university-wide policies and initiatives, a one-stop place to go for help if problems arise locally. The vast majority (perhaps even all) of the people we talked to, despite their frustrations, understood the need for a centralised entity. Many envisioned an important role for FGSR. We agree.

Although the reviewers realize that the College model will inevitably change the traditional roles and responsibilities of Faculties and FGSR in leading and managing graduate education, it is critical for FGSR to continue to serve the entire graduate community at UofA. Attempting to create mini FGSRs at the College and/or Faculty level risks inefficiencies and creates an environment of inconsistent application of rules, regulations, and policies, thus potentially compromising student experiences and the UofA's values. It is imperative that FGSR maintains its leadership role in graduate education at UofA to ensure a smooth transition to the College system and provide optimal support to the graduate community.

No doubt there will be a few functions that should be devolved to the units (either departments or faculties). For instance, administering admissions for certificate programs and course-based masters in professional programs might be better conducted in the local units. If some limited number of functions are better dealt with in the units, those functions must be clearly defined, in a central, easily accessible way. The community needs to know who is responsible for doing what.

In devising a strategy for graduate education, the review team has identified the need for a comprehensive plan that facilitates a thoughtful conversation about the roles and responsibilities of Colleges, Faculties, and FGSR. It is imperative that the new framework avoids duplicating efforts, unnecessary oversight, and ensures operational efficiencies. To this effect, we encourage the development of a structure/framework of collaboration that aims to achieve a balance across the university with respect to responsibilities and expertise (including fostering interdisciplinarity), Faculty-based resourcing, and the incorporation of local knowledge, practices, and program-specific factors at the department level.

Postdoctoral Support: Changing the Name of FGSR

The recent decision of relocating the operation of postdoctoral fellows from VPRI to FGSR has been warmly welcomed by the postdoctoral community at UofA, which boasts one of the largest populations (over 600) PDFs in Canada. FGSR has taken over the awards and financial aspects of support for postdocs and to ensure consistency and best practices, it is also planning to manage HR related activities for postdocs.

These moves signal the University's recognition of the crucial role played by postdocs in contributing to its research and teaching mission. It also acknowledges the urgent need for providing coordinated academic, professional, and administrative support for them.

Further opportunities, such as the extension of postdoctoral supervisory support to include best practices and the inclusion of postdocs in formal supervisory development training would be a natural evolution of the FGSR-postdoc relationship. Centralizing postdoctoral services within FGSR, from appointments and on-boarding to professional development, community-building, and innovative initiatives would provide more consistent and enriched experiences for all postdocs at UofA.

In recognition of this important new role for FGSR (and in line with a global trend), we propose that the name of FGSR be changed to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (FGSPA). This will help FGSR provide robust, consistent support to all postdocs, ensuring a more rewarding and fulfilling experience for postdocs at UofA.

Recommendations:

- i. The name of the unit be changed from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Post-Doctoral Affairs.
- ii. Identify aspects of the graduate student and supervisor professional development activities that can be immediately applied or modified for postdocs.

C. Operational Efficiencies

Communication Matters

Communication appears to be a major problem area, one that requires significant improvements. One set of issues creates relatively minor challenges which can have great consequences: students and graduate administrators say that they often don't receive a response from FGSR staff or that no one picks up the phone in the FGSR offices. These problems can be easily fixed, with some professional development activities and enhancement of staffing, and once the staff stops writing time absorbing memos.

Some concerns about communication are larger in nature: for instance, students not knowing what FGSR does and lack of clarity about who has jurisdiction over what. For instance, there does not seem to be any clear understanding where students should go if they have a conflict with their supervisors. Is it FGSR? Is it the Office of the Student Ombudsperson? Is it the Dean of Students? Each seems to think they are the first stop. Whoever it is, the University needs to make a decision to make it clear to students where, in the first instance, they should go, even if they are then sent somewhere else, given the circumstances of their case. A simple flowchart on the webpage of FGSR can help students and supervisors know about the conflict resolution process. Perhaps the title of the flowchart be 'Here's where you can go if you have a problem with your supervisor' or 'No door is the wrong door'.

Other communication problems that affect successful recruitment are due to features of the antiquated enrolment management system currently in use. For instance, the GSMS admission system is not able to send a routine email to applicants, saying that their application is under review, so students are in the dark until a department's application process is well underway. The introduction of Slate ought to resolve such problems, albeit not for the next admissions cycle.

The business of FGSR lives and dies with effective internal communications. There are communications individuals in FGSR, and our concerns are not with these particular roles, but broader and deeper problems with communications and procedural imperfectness. The restructuring and centralization of the UofA communications may have inadvertently overemphasized external communications to the detriment of effective internal communications.

Recommendations:

- i. There should be a formal review of communication practices. In particular, in partnership with the central communications team, an FGSR-specific internal communications strategy should be crafted. This must include analysis of effective communication strategies to all FGSR stakeholders: graduate students; postdocs; applicants, program directors and administrators, supervisors, and university leadership.
- ii. Once the review of communication practices is complete, minor and major challenges should be addressed, and an online document should be put together and made easily accessible to students, staff, and faculty, clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of departments, faculties, colleges, and FGSR.

Process Improvements

Operational inefficiencies are rife within FGSR. Some of them are detrimental to the very mission of the University. For instance, the length of time it takes to process offers negatively affects the University of Alberta's ability to recruit top-tier students. FGSR staff are well aware of the lost opportunities that come with delays in the admissions process. They expect the launching of Slate for graduate admissions to address some of these issues. They are also working on going digital with all their forms. This will reduce the back-and-forth between departments and the FGSR staff. They want to improve transparency and communicate to students that they are here for them and invested in the student's success.

But some of the inefficiencies are due to an ingrained culture. We heard much frustration around what is perceived as an inflexible enforcement of university-wide standards for graduate admissions. We heard that admissions can take weeks during peak times. Their goal is a five-day turnaround after receipt of the recommendation at FGSR. Part of the problem seems to be duplication of work, part from requiring memos for the admission of a non-standard candidate when a checklist could suffice. There are two memos. First the department sends a memo to the FGSR admissions staff. Then the FGSR staff writes a memo to the dean. Then the dean makes a decision. This memo culture simply must stop and be replaced by a check-list for departments to fill out, which is then quickly reviewed by FGSR staff. The checklist model requires trust: the FGSR admissions team needs to trust the programs and the Dean needs to trust the FGSR admissions team. We discovered that there is appetite within the FGSR staff to move towards such a model, once their IT systems allow for it.

Another example is the barriers for students progressing through programs (e.g. from a certificate program to a masters program, or a doctoral student wanting to take a certificate). The current FGSR regulations require them to be (re)admitted, which creates bureaucratic hurdles for students to pursue their degree options at UofA. Part of the problem, we observed, lies in the inflexible GSMS admission system that does not allow the same student record to be used for admission to certificate program and a degree program. This additional layer of ingrained process makes UofA less competitive within the provincial, national, and international landscape.

Another set of examples we heard were about the somewhat inflexible and elaborate oversight processes that has FGSR deciding that an eminent researcher cannot be an external examiner because they were at an undergraduate college or FGSR rejecting a thesis because the preface and abstract were in the wrong order. We heard that there are too many required forms and complicated procedures that generate a lot of tasks for both FGSR and Faculty staff with no clear rationale. There was a widespread call to make these processes more efficient by reducing the use of forms and by creating a seamless approval process for admission and other decisions.

Moreover, the people we spoke to seemed to be confused as to the roles and responsibilities of FGSR. It is not perceived to work in genuine partnership with the graduate administrators in units, program directors, or faculty members. We heard from both vice/associate deans, program directors and staff that they had to serve as buffers between students and FGSR and faculty members and FGSR. There seems to be over-reach into the academic mission, deciding who can examine students and who cannot. The approach of FGSR seems to be risk avoidance rather than risk management, adding unnecessary bureaucratic burdens. They are focused on doing things to students and faculty, rather than doing things for students and faculty.

People went out of their way to tell us that the Professional Development and Awards and Finance units within FGSR are an exception, with much better communication, transparency, and cooperation with local units. Let us offer Awards and Finance as a model for how all parts of FGSR should operate. Their sense of self is that they respect the expertise in the departments and are open to feedback. They have taken on some important equity work, in trying to ensure that international students know awards are open to them. Awards and Finance works with departments, employing general standards and principles, along with a healthy dose of reasonableness. In rare, highly non-standard cases, they will have a discussion with the Associate Dean of Awards. But generally, they defer to the recommendations of the academic units and sign off on awards. This is the approach that must be adopted throughout FGSR.

For instance, streamlining signature paths and reducing the number of memos back and forth would help to ease the workload while still maintaining integrity in graduate programs. Process reviews should be conducted with discipline units (departments/faculties/college) to determine a more streamlined, less onerous way forward. These problems are pressing and must be addressed.

We also heard that up to three FGSR committees and subcommittees review new programs without incremental improvement to the proposals—this is a superfluous duplication of effort and an avoidable unnecessary frustration to proponents. We also heard that FGSR could improve its exam management practices, by appointing trained exam chairs that are familiar with the discipline of the candidate. Another recurring concern involved, governance structures that ensure changes to policies undergo a proper consultation process, are well drafted, and approved through the proper pathways. Policy seems to be changed quickly, without adequate consultation, without appropriate buy-in, and without laying the groundwork in terms of updated forms, etc. Processes and the micromanaging of processes seems to have accelerated in the last few years.

Part of the reason why the admission process, including the review of the applications, and the adjudication process, remain slow and cumbersome is the absence of a modern, well-functioning admission platform. The current paper-based, manually driven system makes it virtually impossible for all relevant parties to process admissions in a timely manner. Making the decision-making process straightforward, which would allow FGSR and the programs to complete the adjudication process in a reasonable period, requires the introduction of a modern admissions platform. We were pleased to hear that many of these problems are on the way to being resolved. The Office of the Registrar (undergraduate, professional faculties) has the Slate system, which is now being set up for graduate admissions. This should make graduate admissions more streamlined and efficient.

No doubt FGSR is understaffed, although the University-wide budget cuts seem not to have resulted in a significant loss of FGSR staff positions. In fact, the admissions team has had their staffing levels increased, in order to improve processing time. Nonetheless, many of the frustrations we encountered are clearly caused by budget cuts in the teaching units, such as through reductions in student-facing administrative staff.

We heard from FGSR staff that it was hard to find time from their demanding tasks to be responsive to students and faculty members. Given the restructuring and the loss of 860 staff jobs throughout the UofA, it is even more important for the FGSR staff to not duplicate work that is being done in local units and to stop doing small things with no value. The staff in FGSR seems to have been given a list of instructions that they are diligently following. But rather than relying on rules, regulations and instructions of the past, FGSR should streamline and simplify processes, thereby making it easier for them to support the students in their programs and faculty members in their supervisory and teaching roles. We were pleased to see a willingness on their part to listen and improve.

It is important to stress that there is a huge amount of goodwill and creativity on the part of the FGSR staff. They want to be enablers, rather than gate-keepers. The problems are largely a product of ossified practices, the presumptive inflexibility of regulations, and antiquated IT systems. Indeed, the FGSR staff have started to have internal discussions about ways to be more efficient and welcoming. We are optimistic that our review will result in a dramatically improved situation for students, faculty, and staff in the home units and FGSR.

Recommendations:

- i. That a formal review of FGSR policies and approval processes be conducted, with consultation built into all new and evolving policy and approval process changes:
 - a. The review should include critical evaluation of all recommendation steps and approval authorities to determine if they need to be renewed, revised, delegated, or abandoned.
 - b. All processes should be mapped and operationally streamlined to eliminate redundancy and to minimize circuitous routing and turn-around time.
- ii. Once the review and mapping of policy and approval processes is complete, an online policy/process binder should be put together and made easily accessible to students, staff, and faculty, clearly setting out policies and approval processes pertaining to graduate students and post-doctoral researchers.

- iii. A responsive and expedited admission process for exceptional applicants should be piloted to determine whether a two-tiered admission approval process could work in the future state. This could involve the complete delegation of admission authority to certain programs for applicants that are clearly exceptional and well-exceed the minimum standards. Such an action would be a quick win for programs that compete for applications with other institutions.
- iv. Communication around best practices for external examiner process needs to be improved to both faculty members and FGSR staff. Again, the balance between trust in departments/supervisors and maintaining central standards needs to be adjusted.
- v. FGSR thesis specialists should reach out to external authorities on thesis submission standards (including Libraries Canada and ProQuest) to get the most up-to-date critical data on acceptable thesis formats. The thesis guidelines need to be re-drafted de novo and to differentiate between necessary and suggested thesis formats clearly.

D. Graduate Student Funding

The absence of a pan-university dialogue on graduate student funding and its effect on the recruitment of top-tier students

The financial hardship placed upon graduate students throughout the country is becoming increasingly prevalent, with higher rental cost, low vacancy rate, higher inflationary pressures, rising childcare expenses, and elevated food costs all contributing to this problem. In light of these challenges, it is imperative that UofA adopts a more coordinated approach to graduate student funding to remain competitive. The review team has identified a clear lack of cohesion regarding graduate student funding within Faculties and Departments. This is evidenced by widespread confusion surrounding the minimum funding guarantee, lack of transparency of funding sources, and the absence of a shared plan for graduate funding. The potential consequences of inaction could be dire, as it might make UofA very challenging to attract and retain top-tier graduate students who could ultimately choose to attend other universities that offer more competitive funding packages.

We have also noted that the university currently lacks an effective data management system necessary for providing accurate and up-to-date information on graduate student funding. The overly competitive landscape of graduate enrolment, coupled with the complexities associated with the graduate student experience, makes it necessary that graduate administrators and the senior leadership team have access to a comprehensive graduate funding database. To this effect, the creation of a live funding data management system will allow FGSR to provide a single point of access to all funding information of graduate students

in research-based programs. This database would serve as a central repository; provide a comprehensive and current view of funding sources and funding packages of graduate students, in aggregate, through a tracking dashboard. Given issues of privacy, it is imperative that identifiable funding data be held and managed securely within FGSR with the Dean acting as the official data steward. Such a system will allow FGSR to align its mission with the newly developed strategic plan of UofA that aims to further strengthen the institution's reputation as a top-tier research-intensive university in the world. By building this system, FGSR would also be able to better support graduate administrators in recruiting and retaining top talents.

Recommendations:

- i. To promote a more cohesive approach to graduate student funding, we recommend that FGSR form a task force dedicated to reviewing the current funding situation and developing a shared agenda on funding. This should involve the development of a broad-based consensus on minimum guaranteed amount for doctoral and thesis-based masters' students and the process and interval for regularly scheduled revision of minima.
- ii. We suggest that FGSR creates a centralized, comprehensive funding dashboard. This will provide Colleges, Faculties, and Programs with real-time access to individual student funding from a variety of sources, including internal and external awards, teaching and research assistantships, and bursaries.

E. Graduate Student Enrolment and Program Development

Strategic Graduate Enrolment Management

The review team has identified an opportunity for improvements in the UofA's Strategic Graduate Enrolment Management processes. We recommend the establishment of a Strategic Graduate Enrolment Management Group (SEMG), led by Deputy Provost (Enrolment) and including FGSR as a key member of the Group. The SEMG will regularly engage in a pre-planning exercise to explore important issues related to strategic enrolment management processes for UofA. The group's discussions and decisions will support the adoption of an evidence-based, more systematic approach to graduate enrolment management, which will help UofA to expand graduate enrolment in a strategic manner. Additionally, the SEMG Group will contribute to the development of a long-term enrolment plan that considers the appropriate ratio of graduate to undergraduate students, identifies areas of graduate enrolment growth in strategically important areas, and creates an enrolment-focused budget that supports growth and maximizes benefits in terms of revenue and research productivity.

Recommendations:

We encourage UofA to establish a Strategic Graduate Enrolment Management Group designed to strengthen a culture of evidence-based enrolment planning at the graduate level.

Graduate Program Development

Through the course of the review, it was apparent that the enthusiasm or processes for the creation and revision of graduate programming has dwindled. This is unsurprising given the recent uncertainty in the details of the future activity-based budget model, and in the wake of the institution's reorganization and budget cuts. However, it is a natural leadership opportunity for FGSR to work directly with the three Colleges [and the stand-alone Faculties] to establish a collaborative hub of graduate program review and development. With appropriate resourcing and representation from the Colleges, the office of the Registrar, and the Vice-Provost teams in Programs, Learning Initiatives, Equity Diversity and Inclusion, and Indigenous Programming and Research, FGSR could take the lead in orchestrating program creation, revision and reviews from ideation through to proposal approval. By decreasing the activation energy and confusion of program creation and development processes, a greater number of academic proponents could be identified and empowered to lead program innovation and improvement in the graduate education landscape at the UofA.

Recommendations:

We encourage FGSR to lead a formal collaborative group including representation from the three Colleges and relevant Vice-Provostial offices focused on graduate program creation and development.

Conclusion

During our review of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta, we interacted with approximately one hundred dedicated stakeholders of the graduate education community. Our discussions were informative, candid, and engaging. They demonstrated the collective will of the community to improve the quality, consistency, and operational efficiency of graduate education and postdoctoral support offered by the University. While perspectives and lived experiences varied across stakeholder groups, a number of general themes emerged:

- The leadership, coordination, and administration of graduate studies and post-doctoral affairs at the UofA must remain centralized under a cohesive one-university unit. It is our strong recommendation that these overarching roles and responsibilities remain with a newly named Faculty of Graduate Studies and Post-Doctoral Affairs.
- FGSR is currently perceived as a barrier. The primary role of FGSR should not be to enforce the status quo but to be a force for facilitation and change. FGSR must move from an oversight and policing model to a support and visionary model. While there are necessary regulatory functions that FGSR must perform, the mindset should be more weighted to leadership in graduate and post-graduate matters rather than oversight.
- Trust between FGSR and other units across campus has eroded significantly. Rebuilding these relationships is critical to the success of the graduate school so that FGSR can return to what one person called a 'paragon of policy, student and program support and working together with departments.'
- A lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities, authorities, information flow, and duties of care is fueling frustration for staff and students and creating inefficiencies, redundancies, confusion, and uncertainties.
- FGSR staff are valuable, loyal, and highly competent colleagues and—with the right leadership and empowerment—will enthusiastically facilitate change within the unit to benefit the wider graduate education community.
- The Faculty's General Manager and Interim Vice-Provost and Dean have the will, trust, and creativity to lead the implementation of changes and reforms recommended as a part of this report. They were brought in with a specific mandate and must follow through on those good intentions along with the Interim Dean's successor.

The Marshall Report describes FGSR as an afterthought. An instance of this attitude can be seen in the fact that the new enrolment strategy and technology has been rolled out for undergraduates, but graduate students are still waiting for it. The University must fully commit to and integrate FGSR, making it clear that it is front and centre in the life of the University of Alberta, for the simple reason that graduate students and postdoctoral researchers are at the very heart of this research-intensive university.

Fundamental changes are urgently needed if the University of Alberta is to maintain and enhance its stature in the vital domain of graduate education and post-doctoral research. The senior administration is alert to the need to reform FGSR and is willing to support and resource the required changes.

The University of Alberta is a top-five research institution in Canada with a long-standing reputation for offering world-class graduate education and training for professional, research, and creative careers. Reestablishing FGSR as a future-focused leader, advocate, supporter, and catalyst for excellence and innovation in graduate education and post-doctoral training will ensure the continuation of this well-deserved reputation into the next decade.

Summary of Recommendations

Short-term:

Recommendation 1: Identify aspects of the graduate student and supervisor professional development activities that can be immediately applied or modified for postdocs.

Recommendation 2: A responsive and expedited admission process for exceptional applicants should be piloted to determine whether a two-tiered admission approval process could work in the future state. This could involve the complete delegation of admission authority to certain programs for applicants that are clearly exceptional and well-exceed the minimum standards. Such an action would be a quick win for programs that compete for applications with other institutions.

Recommendation 3: FGSR thesis specialist to reach out to external authorities on thesis submission standards (including Libraries Canada and ProQuest) to get the most up-to-date critical data on acceptable thesis formats. The thesis guidelines need to be re-drafted de novo and to differentiate between necessary and suggested thesis formats clearly.

Medium-term (6-12 months):

Recommendation 4: The name of the unit be changed from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Post-Doctoral Affairs.

Recommendation 5: There should be a formal review of communication practices. In particular, in partnership with the central communications team, an FGSR-specific internal communications strategy should be crafted. This must include analysis of effective communication strategies to all FGSR stakeholders: graduate students; post docs; applicants, program directors and administrators, supervisors, and university leadership.

Recommendation 6: Once the review of communication practices is complete, minor and major challenges should be addressed, and a online document should be put together and made easily accessible to students, staff, and faculty, clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of departments, faculties, colleges, and FGSR.

Recommendation 7: That a formal review of FGSR policies and approval processes be conducted, with consultation built into all new and evolving policy and approval process changes.

- a. The review should include critical evaluation of all recommendation steps and approval authorities to determine if they need to be renewed, revised, delegated, or abandoned.
- b. All processes should be mapped and operationally streamlined to eliminate redundancy and to minimize circuitous routing and turn-around time.

Recommendation 8: Once the review and mapping of policy and approval processes is complete, an online policy/process binder should be put together and made easily accessible to students, staff, and faculty, clearly setting out policies and approval processes pertaining to graduate students and post-doctoral researchers.

Recommendation 9: Communication around best practices for the external examiner process needs to be improved to both faculty members and FGSR staff. Again, the balance between trust in departments/supervisors and maintaining central standards needs to be finely adjusted.

Recommendation 10: To promote a more cohesive approach to graduate student funding, we recommend that FGSR form a task force dedicated to reviewing the current funding situation and developing a shared agenda on funding. This should involve the development of a broad- based consensus on minimum guaranteed amount for doctoral and thesis-based masters' students and the process and interval for regularly scheduled revision of minima.

Long-term (12-36 months):

Recommendation 11: We suggest that FGSR creates a centralized, comprehensive funding dashboard. This will provide Colleges, Faculties, and Programs with real-time access to individual student funding from a variety of sources, including internal and external awards, teaching and research assistantships, and bursaries.

Recommendation 12: We encourage UofA to establish a Strategic Graduate Enrolment Management Group designed to strengthen a culture of evidence-based enrolment planning at the graduate level.

Recommendation 13: We encourage FGSR to lead a collaborative group including representation from the three Colleges and relevant Vice-Provostial offices focused on graduate program creation and development.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference

1. The Task:

University of Alberta policy requires a periodic review of academic units, including FGSR, which occupies a singular institutional position with a complex set of academic and administrative roles. The last formal, external review of FGSR was completed in 2008, although major internal reviews of graduate education and graduate administration have occurred since then, resulting in changes in structures, responsibilities, and processes.

At this stage, a number of significant developments have again shifted the landscape in which FGSR operates:

- the adoption of a One University model, including the restructuring of most faculties into three colleges and the centralization of administrative services;
- a new and challenging funding environment;
- expectations around enrolment growth, graduate and undergraduate, as a central part of a new strategic planning process; and,
- the University's adoption of formal commitments both to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and to Indigenization.

The review will precede and help define roles and priorities for the recruitment of the next Dean.

2. Purpose:

The primary purpose of the review will be to consider and make recommendations with respect to how the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research is positioned structurally within the University. In particular, the review will consider the following:

- how FGSR operates as a partner in graduate education and its administration across the University;
- how its roles and responsibilities can be clarified within a new operating model so that it provides appropriate academic leadership; effectively supports students, faculty, and staff; enables a full range of graduate programs, and encourages innovation;

- how its strengths can be identified and affirmed;
- how the administrative processes and regulatory functions that involve FGSR can be improved and sustained at a high standard;
- how practices of collegial governance, in particular FGSR Council and its committees, can be upheld and reconstituted in light of other structural changes across the University.

3. Reviewers:

The review will be conducted by a small, external group – preferably a group of three – plus a supporting scribe. This is a matter of deliberate choice. The alternative of a large, mostly internal review committee populated by a full set of representatives is likely to replicate the many rounds of consultations that have occurred in recent years. It is time for fresh eyes.

The challenge is that this is far from a steady-state period in the life of the University or FGSR. External reviewers will need to think on three levels at once: that of complex, evolving University level structures; that of the general state of graduate education; and that of administrative operations practices. A review team will need adequate time to consult with a wide range of stakeholders who will have views on some aspect of FGSR. Those stakeholders include the Graduate Students' Association; the Post-Doctoral Fellows Association; graduate administrators, graduate coordinators/directors, and associate deans in departments and faculties; supervisors; FGSR staff; and senior academic leadership (faculty deans, college deans/vice-provosts, provost, deputy provosts, and vice-provosts).

4. Documentation:

In recent years, as part of a Value Alignment Project and Graduate Administrative Visioning and Restructuring activities, FGSR has prepared a great deal of material in the context of University reorganization that will remain relevant to this review. While some of that material is tied to proposals for roles and responsibilities within the One University operating model that have not been accepted, it also provides a current description of the Faculty, historical background, and a record of recent consultations. The review team will have access to previous reports as well. The Interim Vice-Provost and Dean will provide some contextualization of those documents, and, together with senior academic leadership of the University, will meet the review team at the start of the site visit.

5. Timeline:

Invitations to reviewers/confirmation of review team January 2022
Site visit February-March 2023
Report end of May 2023

Appendix B

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Unit Review Consultations

- Graduate Students Association Executive and Representatives
- Graduate Administrators (NASA Administrators) and College General Managers
- Associate Deans, Graduate and Graduate Coordinators / Grad Program Directors
- Graduate Supervisors
- Graduate Students
- Faculty Deans
- College Deans and College Associate Deans Education/Research
- FGSR Admissions and Functional Analysts Team
- FGSR Program Progression Team
- PostDoctoral Fellows Association - Executive and Others
- FGSR Awards & Finance Team
- FGSR Decanal Team
- FGSR Office Services, Communications and Fees Team Members, Graduate Ombuds and Dean of Students Psychologist
- Vice-Provosts
- FGSR Professional Development Team Members