

## **UNB Response: A Review of Graduate Studies Policies at the University of New Brunswick**

September 14, 2023

I want to begin by thanking Drs. Gayle MacDonald and Noreen Golfman for their exceptional work in assessing the operations of graduate education at our university. We have reviewed their report, including the 18 recommendations. We are pleased to see that in general their report affirms that UNB's policies and practices are fit for purpose and align with those at other Canadian comprehensive universities. At the same time, they have identified areas where we can improve and we are committed to implementing changes, where appropriate, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement.

Our School of Graduate Studies has worked hard to build and maintain a reputation for excellence in graduate education among Canadian comprehensive universities. This is evidenced by our capture of national student awards, our documented student successes after graduation, and growing graduate enrollments across programs. More recently, we have been guided by a focus on "inclusive excellence," to use the framework adopted by [current leadership of the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies](#). While aiming to deliver rigorous programming and train highly qualified professionals and scholars, we also aim to serve and mentor students with flexibility and humanity.

The report by Drs. MacDonald and Golfman presents an opportunity to examine our policies and practices and ensure we are operating in line with best practices as an institution. Their review has uncovered some areas that warrant attention. I am pleased to see that our School of Graduate Studies has already begun the implementation process and am convinced that this review and revision of policy and practice will further advance our university.

The following is a summary of the report's recommendations and a response to how each recommendation is being addressed by UNB:

### **Admissions**

We were pleased to see that the reviewers concluded that there are no concerns in the admissions process and the regulations governing applications are clear. They did hear concerns from individuals related to admission to the PhD Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) program. It is important to note that the mandate for the review did not include reviewing the particular concerns of specific graduate programs.

Review interviews uncovered information that highlights some of the challenges Canadian universities face in administering IDST graduate programs, which is acknowledged by the reviewers in the report. We agree with these national programmatic challenges and will continue to engage with our national counterparts to ensure our institution is operating consistent with best practices with respect to our IDST graduate program.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>UNB Response</b>
1.1 RECOMMENDATION – that admission policy to the PhD.IDST be more rigorous, with applications having both a program of study and a supervisory team in place at the time of application submission.	We agree and accept this recommendation and will implement this change to develop comparable standards for the 2024 intake.
1.2 RECOMMENDATION – that acceptance criteria be published in the same place as the regular doctoral programs.	We agree and accept this recommendation and will implement this change during the 2023-24 academic year.
1.3 RECOMMENDATION - that the IDST program has clearer administrative oversight and program delivery.	<p>We agree and accept this recommendation and will implement this change during the 2023-24 academic year.</p> <p>This recommendation highlights some of the national challenges encountered by universities with respect to graduate IDST programs. We are committed to reviewing and subsequently adopting a standard structure of oversight in line with other GAUs on campus.</p>
1.4 RECOMMENDATION – that funding be provided for the PhD.IDST program equitably comparable to other programmes across both campuses.	We agree with the importance of having an equitable funding model and are confident that these issues will be resolved through our move to a One UNB budget and administrative structure this fall.
1.5 RECOMMENDATION - that supervision and program delivery to IDST students be standardized.	<p>We agree and accept that standardization is required for this particular program, since it can be delivered by any faculty, which results in challenges in the program's oversight.</p> <p>We will engage the IDST advisory committee to review supervisory structures and practices</p>

	across campus to develop common practices over the 2023-24 academic year.
1.6 RECOMMENDATION – that the university accept fewer students into the program, unless there is confidence in both strong supervisory teams and funding support in place.	We are committed to addressing these concerns through developing strong supervisory teams and providing funding support consistency as per the implementation of the above recommendations.

**Graduate Studies Supervision and Assessment Committees**

This section of the report focuses on issues related to communication and coordination of programming for research-based graduate students. Concerns identified include: the importance of effective supervision and healthy communications and relationships between supervisors and students. The role of the Director of Graduate Studies in each Graduate Academic Unit (GAU) in coordinating key elements of graduate programming is another important component.

Some of the recommendations in this section are items that can be addressed right away, which would help to address some of the unevenness and communications concerns raised.

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>UNB Response</b>
2.1 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies establish a deadline by which time supervisory committees should be determined in each unit.	<p>We agree with the principle behind this recommendation. Supervisory committees are normally convened at a common program stage (post comprehensive exam) or at a common time in program (end of first semester) depending on the discipline and its particular doctoral training requirements.</p> <p>We accept the need for a rigorous review of annual progress reports to ensure supervisory committees are in place at the appropriate time. We will undertake a review this year to establish standard practices for GAUs.</p>
2.2 RECOMMENDATION The doctoral admission policy takes into account the University's supervisory capacity in any given admissions cycle.	We accept this recommendation and are committed to ensure this is addressed in all programs.

<p>2.3 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies establish annual orientation workshops for new Directors.</p>	<p>We agree and accept this recommendation and have implemented new director orientation sessions, beginning fall 2023.</p>
<p>2.4 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies host annual workshops for Directors of GAUs to share best practices and challenging situations.</p>	<p>We agree and accept this recommendation. We normally hold biannual meetings with directors, and will expand this programming to include workshops and professional development (on mentoring, admission ethics, etc.) beginning in the 2023-24 academic year.</p>
<p>2.5 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies assess inequities in GAU support and student funding across both campuses to remedy this issue.</p>	<p>Our GAU funding is based on an enrollment calculation, which will continue to be the case. We are addressing challenges around support and funding between campuses (in general) at UNB with the move to a One UNB budget and administrative structure, which will be implemented this fall.</p>
<p>2.6 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies aims for more communication and transparency across both campuses.</p>	<p>We agree that transparency and communication is crucial for the success of our graduate students. We are addressing these challenges through our move to a One UNB administrative structure, which will be implemented this fall.</p>

**External Examiners, Conflict of Interest, Thesis Examination**

The review revealed that the general processes around final examination of the PhD at UNB are consistent with others across the country. Inclusion of an external examiner is one detail to which most all universities are committed. The expectations of the external examiner are similar, namely that they be a PhD-trained scholar of significant standing with a clear and respected record of advanced research and a national/international profile in the area being examined.

We were pleased to see that UNB is not out-of-step with current North American practice in respect of the final examination processes. However, the review revealed that there are areas where the process could be improved and/or policy also changed to better align with the ideals of ensuring the highest possible integrity of the processes around awarding PhDs. The report makes a number of productive suggestions in this respect.

Recommendations	UNB Response
3.1 RECOMMENDATION – that the conflict-of-interest form be revised for clarity and with a view to best practices (Tri-Agency).	We agree and accept this recommendation.
3.2 RECOMMENDATION -- that the School of Graduate Studies review its conflict-of-interest form to ensure all members of the examining board are required to fill it out.	We agree and accept this recommendation.
3.3 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate studies consider removing members of supervisory committees as voting participants from final examination committees.	We agree with the principle of this recommendation. Prior to implementation, we will review common examining committee regulations and practices across disciplines and among universities across Canada with a view to adopting an approach consistent with national best practices.
3.4 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies develop a stronger set of criteria for the appointment of external examiners.	We agree and accept this recommendation. We will refine our guidelines to include explicit criteria to guide GAUs in their recommendations for SGS approval.

**Policies and Protocols on Student Publication Embargoes**

This section focuses on delays (embargoes) in publishing student thesis and dissertations. The report notes that it is ideal to honour the responsibility of immediate release. It acknowledges that there are situations where Canadian universities delay the release, which could include reasons such as allowing the students time to secure a major publisher, to allow time for patent-filing or protections of intellectual property, or to honour agreements with external funding partners. UNB's current policy matches those of our Canadian partners; however, the one differing element in UNB's policies is the maximum allowable duration of the embargo, which was highlighted in the report and forms the basis of the following recommendation.

Recommendation	UNB Response
4.1. RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies revise its "FORM TO REQUEST DELAY OF PUBLICATION OF A THESIS/DISSERTATION" in alignment with best practices at other Canadian universities and allowing embargoes for no longer than up to two years and always/ only with the explicit	We agree and accept this recommendation.

permission of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies.	
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## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The issues of equity, diversity and inclusion were not in scope for this review, but these issues arose in interviews with the reviewers and has been included for consideration. The reviewers found that most units approach the work of supervision and mentoring of doctoral candidates with good intentions, but that there may be value in undertaking an equity analysis.

Recommendations	UNB Response
5.1 RECOMMENDATION- That the university undertake an equity analysis of doctoral student programmes to determine if the five areas of EDI are taken into account at the admissions, supervision and that financial supports are equitably to diverse doctoral candidates.	<p>As outlined in the introduction and in line with our pursuit of inclusive excellence, we agree and accept that we must continue to strengthen our EDI policies and practices.</p> <p>We will form a working group to examine admissions, funding and program accessibility with an EDI lens.</p>

With UNB Toward 2030 as our guide, we will continue to explore ways to grow and improve our School of Graduate Studies at UNB. I again thank Drs. MacDonald and Golfman for their [thorough review and report](#). I look forward to working with our faculty, students and staff to move forward in implementing the recommendations.

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