



## FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES MEETING MINUTES

28 SEPTEMBER 2023 | 12:30 PM | Zoom

A meeting of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies was held on Thursday, 28 September 2023 at 12:30 pm. Dean S. Porter was the Chair.

### ATTENDANCE

**Voting:** J. Aleksejuniene, J. Brinkman, D. Clemens, H. Cote, T. Dobson, D. Elmo, J. Fletcher, A. Frankel, I. Gill, M. Gordon, D. Grecov, S. Hagerman, N. Hodges, C. Hoppmann, B. Howard, M. Hunt, R. Kainth, J. Karim, J. Locher, T. Molyneux, N. Mousavi, S. Porter, M. Read, N. Romualdi, R. Sharma, P. Shipley, M. Spering, M. Taiebat, B. Weber

**Staff:** K. Mazure, B. Morey

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

S. Porter called the meeting to order at 12:33 pm.

### 2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT – S. Porter

### 3. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

*Approved by  
general consensus*

}

*That the agenda of the 28 September 2023 meeting of the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies be approved.*

*Carried.*

### 4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

*Approved by  
general consensus*

}

*That the minutes of the 27 April 2023 meeting of the Faculty  
of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies be approved.*

*Carried.*

### 5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None.

### 6. CHAIR'S REMARKS – S. Porter

S. Porter stated that she only has three months left as Dean, and that the next Dean is not decided at this moment. She will do her best to make sure the transition is smooth, and will miss the Faculty, staff, and students.

Thesis pages have been updated regarding what a thesis should look like and what it should/might contain. There is no new policy associated with it, but it is framed in a way that makes it clear that it does not have to be a traditional written monograph or manuscript. The Faculty is also looking to start reimagining dissertations and doctoral research. Faculty members were encouraged to read these thesis pages.



The Faculty would ultimately like to have a collaborative PhD where students from a wide variety of disciplines will work on a project together. This might not be feasible due to financial limitations at this time. The Faculty has launched a competition for supervisors and their students to propose a collaborative project that would form part of the student's dissertation. The idea is to encourage graduate students to learn to collaborate with others, especially across disciplines.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation march is on September 30 at 10 am. Faculty were encouraged to attend.

B. Morey stated that the new admissions platform goes live for IRP/Workday Student next week. The Workday team will need a few weeks to learn how the system works, so there may be a bit of a delay in responses during this time. Urgent matters will be swiftly sorted out.

**7. PUBLIC ACCESS TO DOCTORAL EXAMS AND OVERSIGHT OF GRADUATE CERTIFICATES – M. Hunt**

English Language Proficiency Tests

- M. Hunt stated that this policy change includes getting rid of a dedicated English Language Proficiency Test website for graduate studies, and putting it in the UBC website instead. This is just a reconfiguration to the calendar.

<i>Approved by general consensus</i>	}	<i>That the English Language Proficiency Tests policy changes be approved.</i>
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*Carried.*

English Language Proficiency Standards and GRE Requirements

- M. Hunt stated that this policy change is regarding applicant evidence of an English Language Proficiency Test.

<i>Approved by general consensus</i>	}	<i>That the English Language Proficiency Standards and GRE Requirements policy changes be approved.</i>
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*Carried.*

Doctoral Degrees and Master's Degrees Required Documentation

- M. Hunt stated that the Doctoral Degrees Required Documentation policy changes include dropping the minimum number of reference letters from three down to two for programs across UBC. If a program wants to require more, that is their decision. These letters can be from professional referees, and do not have to be academic.
- D. Clemens asked if the language used could be used to challenge programs at an admissions stage based on program specific requirements of three reference letters versus the literal translation included in the document. In other words, students might think there is no minimum based on the language of that passage, and could bring it to Senate to challenge the requirement to have three reference letters.
- M. Hunt stated they need another bullet point that specifically states that certain programs may require additional or larger documentation or requirements above these minimums. This might be enough to state that the requirement is up to the program to decide.
- S. Porter stated it is not necessary, as all degree the requirements are minimum. Programs add many other requirements such as a Masters, specific courses, higher grades, etc. She stated that she does not think one letter above the minimum would be a problem, and that the word "minimum" does not need to be included.
- M. Hunt agreed with S. Porter.
- T. Dobson asked to remove the section about academic professional referees. There is a challenge in some programs that the Faculty is requiring some students to have at least one academic reference. The statement indicated might be used by students. She would prefer to have programs make those types of stipulations instead.



- S. Porter responded that there are lots of things that programs go above and beyond the minimum for. She suggested that the passage indicate that two confidential references are required, and that it is up to the program to confirm whether they want them to be academic or professional.
- M. Hunt responded that there was a lot of confusion in the programs last year, where people thought the references had to be academic. Part of the discussion regarding this was to make the requirement more explicit. This should also be on the program website, not just the calendar. He agreed with S. Porter that if they do not put forth program minimums or program specifics, this would need be done at a full stop; they cannot pick and choose which to give minimums for.
- A. Frankel proposed adding the change “professional referees, for example.” This would indicate to people that these are some of the options, as a suggestion, without limiting options.
- S. Porter asked what other kind of references there could be other than personal ones, if not professional ones.
- M. Hunt stated that the term “professional” is chosen for a reason. The other option would be “non-academic,” but that sets forth the opportunity to make it a personal reference, which is not what they want.
- S. Porter elaborated that some references may not necessarily be considered professional references but may still be a relevant reference.
- M. Read stated that Senate admissions might be upset if there is no minimum included for the number of letters. Numbers are very concrete, so it might be safer to put a minimum of two confidential reference reports.
- S. Porter wondered if people would interpret this as that they could include five reference letters, for example.
- J. Locher stated there is a limited set of numbers of letters they can include. He echoed what M. Hunt said about including another bullet point to make it explicit that program requirements can extend or build on these minimums.
- M. Hunt agreed with J. Locher and stated this was done in the previous language changes regarding the English Language Proficiency.
- S. Porter asked if it these minimums are never stated anywhere else in general.
- M. Read replied that it is probably stated in EVision, and is stated with regards to minimum academic requirements. This section is specifically for required documentation. There is an advantage to make it clear it is a minimum of two, so people cannot challenge it. There could be a bullet point that indicates that programs can determine whether two or three references are required.
- S. Porter asked for a program requiring three reference letters, if someone only wanted to submit two, if they would try to challenge this minimum.
- T. Dobson suggested using the following language: “At least two confidential reference reports. Normally these are from academic or professional referees, and speak to the applicant’s appropriateness for the graduate program.”
- M. Hunt liked T. Dobson’s suggestion. He asked what would be an abnormal situation (i.e. what other kind of references would be accepted besides professional)?
- S. Porter responded that this could be someone who can speak on behalf of an applicant’s qualities, but who they are not connected professionally with (not a boss). An example could be someone an applicant volunteered for.
- M. Read stated that S. Porter’s example would be a professional person overseeing volunteer work.
- S. Porter stated that in this example, it is not clear that it is a professional reference.
- R. Kainth stated that distinction might be with paid work or unpaid work.
- M. Hunt stated he supports the changes T. Dobson suggested, and S. Porter agreed.

<i>Approved by general consensus</i>	}	<i>That the Doctoral Degrees and Master’s Degrees Required Documentation policy changes be approved.</i>
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*Carried.*

New Senate Policies: V-127 & V-128

- M. Hunt presented on behalf of J. Phelps regarding new Senate policies on graduate certificates and diplomas.
  - The changes included state that that the administrative and academic responsibility will now be held by the Faculty.



- These changes have already been approved.
- M. Hunt covered the onboarding timeline:
  - From now to December 2024, all of the academic policies and admin practices for graduate certificates and diplomas are being developed/approved.
  - The hope is that all new programs effective January 2025 will have the updated and relevant policies.
- S. Porter asked P. Shipley if he has any experience in the realm of graduate certificates and diplomas.
- P. Shipley responded that most of their work has been in non-credit credentials, but that their few graduate certificates have rolled out nicely.
- M. Hunt stated that they have few offerings as well, but there are a number of back channel conversations coming up soon.
- J. Aleksejuniene asked about if there are more certificate options in micro credentials and non-credits.
- M. Hunt said he could not speak on that.
- S. Porter stated that this has always been possible and asked for J. Fletcher to speak on this.
- J. Fletcher stated that there is a new Senate policy for the non-credit policy (i.e. what they are, and what they should contain).

#### Update on Doctoral Exams

- The number of doctoral exams has increased back to normal this year after it was previously lower due to the pandemic.
- The summer month exams are occurring more at the Graduate Studies Centre, but it is still the minority in comparison to off-site and online exams.
- University examiner eligibility changes:
  - Reducing the number of “arm’s length” university examiners to “at least one.”
  - Impact on exam committee composition: the majority of exams have had 2 arm’s length examiners.
  - Impact on exception requests:
    - Average number of requests (Assistant Professor, non-G+PS member) per 3-month block is about 15.
    - The number of requests in summer 2023 was eight.
  - Preliminary take homes:
    - No appreciable increase in number of collaborators on exam committees (integrity and objectivity of exam committee does not appear to be compromised).
    - Reduction in number of exception requests (supervisors are having an easier time finding appropriate people to fill these important roles).
- Virtual doctoral exams
  - COVID necessitated a switch to zoom for doctoral exams that was a big change from policy.
    - Virtual attendance was available previously, but limited to external examiner involvement and emergencies for exam committee members.
  - Created many new opportunities for inclusion and efficiency, but also new challenges that require consideration.
  - Benefits:
    - Substantial increase in external examiner attendance at exams.
    - More flexibility for scheduling, especially during travel times.
    - Opportunity to overcome space constraints.
    - More inclusive to audience members from the public and non-university community.
  - Challenges:
    - Potential for disruptive attendees (deliberate or accidental).
    - Technological challenges with software and hardware (results in disruption to the candidate and scheduling concerns).
    - Potential for recording (and dissemination) of the proceedings.
    - If hybrid, Chair must monitor audience and facilitate discussion in two environments (especially relevant during in camera conversations).



### Doctoral Exams Discussion

- M. Hunt asked for feedback on the virtual exam process.
- S. Hagerman stated there is a huge value in having these exams be public facing as a public institution. There is also a huge benefit of having external examiners participate in a virtual environment. More broadly, so many of the things done at the university now are done online, so there may be no going back. She stated she liked the idea of thinking through principles to make sure some of the challenges are mitigated.
- C. Hoppmann recognized the challenges of hybrid format and asked if it is realistic to ask the committee or candidate to decide at the front end which one they would opt for.
- M. Hunt stated that it is not an option, but more of a necessity. If one member of the examination committee cannot be on campus, the options are to wait, or do a hybrid exam.
- S. Porter stated the university has always done hybrid in a sense. The university has allowed use of Skype for external examiner participation in the past.
- R. Starkey stated that the vast majority of in-person exams have at least one remote attendee at this point, often at the last minute. In those cases, we have moved those people who could not attend in person onto Zoom and made it hybrid. We are decently good at doing this now.
- M. Sperring agreed with R. Starkey about ad hoc hybrid attendance and stated it would be valuable to have clear guidance and room checklists for minimum technological requirements.
- R. Starkey stated that there is guidance provided, and people are encouraged to practice with their team. Even with guidance and practice, there can still be problems on the day of that cannot be anticipated. She offered for her team to be present on Zoom during exams if that would be helpful.
- H. Cote stated that the hybrid format is valuable and we need to adapt.
- D. Clemens stated that many candidates in ECON, for example, are no longer in Vancouver at the time of defense and Faculty are often away (many of the defenses are during the summer). He was not suggesting that a virtual format is off the table, but losing the virtual option is a financial cost and the environmental impact to travel back that is not insignificant.
- J. Karim stated that the hybrid option is valuable. She attended a hybrid MSc defense a couple weeks ago where one of the examiners was on Zoom, and the other examiners including the student were in person. It ran smoothly and there were 25 people on the Zoom call (all the guests attended on Zoom).
- M. Gordon asked if the renovation of the Graduate Student Centre had plans to include better infrastructure for having hybrid exams. If the proper technology is present, it is much more helpful, which M. Hunt agreed with.
- J. Locher stated they have done some modifications and are evaluating other options. More insights can be provided on what this might look like in the near future.
- M. Hunt stated it sounds like there is not much of a push to make it 100% private, which is good. Facilitating the option for public facing exams is desirable for many students in the context of being able to celebrate with others. He will continue to take comments offline and will continue to speak with R. Starkey about this matter.

## 8. GRADUATE STUDENT HOUSING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – J. Locher & N. Romualdi

### Graduate Life Centre

- The Thea Koerner House was donated to act as a “home away from home” for graduate students.
- TKH is currently in dire need of renovations and some spaces are drastically underused.
- G+PS and UBC have committed to work with the GSS to renovate TKH.
- Objectives:
  - Revitalize TKH to serve the modern needs of the much more diverse and larger UBC graduate student community.
  - Conserve the heritage elements and incorporate sustainable practices.
- Many renovations have already occurred based on inspiration previously discussed in past meetings.
- This space will be launched in November for use, and it is currently making good progress.



- We have had guaranteed Winter Session rooms for grad students since 2017W.
- There has been six years of “first come, first serve” approach with rooms focused on relocation benefits (eligibility tied to prior location of lower mainland and no previous UBC experience).
- 2023W was the first year of the allocation approach, and this approach is currently being assessed for efficacy.
- Considerations included access, affordability, engagement opportunities, community building, strategic priorities (EDI, recruitment, etc.).
- Background:
  - For 2023W1, G+PS distributed guaranteed winter housing seats to the 39 participating departments based on enrolment.
  - Once the seats are allocated to a department, the department had full control on allocating the seats.
  - There were 200 guaranteed seats by SHCS; 175 seats were distributed, 145 seats were allocated, and 106 seats were guaranteed housed (with 94 seats for a general pool).
  - No seats were wasted in this process because every single seat that was not filled in this process was filled by a general pool of graduate students.
  - Residences included Cedar House, Walter Gage, and Fairview Crescent in studios, one bedrooms, four bedrooms, and six bedrooms.
- Assessment
  - They surveyed students currently placed in residence under the guaranteed winter housing project (on-going, preliminary results available).
  - They received 52 survey responses from students.
  - A survey with participating units is imminent.
  - Possible other surveys:
    - Applicants who reject UBC’s offer.
    - Applicants who enrolled but were not part of the pilot.
- Timeline of how the process worked last year:
  - G+PS allocates seats to departments.
  - Departments allocate seats to applicants and then communicate said allocation to the applicant and to G+PS.
  - Applicant must apply to Winter Housing by May 1.
  - G+PS consolidates their list and communicates it to UBC housing.
  - UBC housing cross references the applications with the provided list and makes offers in mid-June.
  - Applicant accepts their offer and then moves in at the beginning of September.
- Possible Housing Pathway
  - After winter housing, students could move into summer housing, year-round housing, family housing, graduate college housing, or market housing in Vancouver.
  - Direct entry into these housing options is possible, but sometimes difficult due to lack of availability, and difficulty in engaging with private landlords from out of Vancouver.
- Student Satisfaction with Current Accommodation
  - The majority of students noted they are very satisfied with their housing situation in winter housing.
- Impact on Student Experience
  - The majority of students agreed that living on campus makes it easier to engage in campus activities and social events.
  - On-campus housing can support graduate student wellbeing goals.
  - Most students want to stay in UBC student housing for the entirety of their degree.
- Summary
  - Surveyed students agree that living on campus enhances their student experience and 92% would like to stay in housing until the end of their program.
  - 63% indicated that guaranteed housing affected their decision to attend UBC. In most cases of the other 37%, they found out after they had already accepted the offer.
  - The complex logistics of distributing limited seats reduced effectiveness (105 students housed of 200 through the guarantee).



- The timing of the pilot was not ideal (structured relatively late in the admissions cycle).
- M. Spering asked to clarify if they are referring to programs or departments. There are cross departmental programs, so how would allocation work in this case?
- N. Romualdi responded that every program that was part of any given department is allocated seats. There are fewer departments than programs, which allows for easier allocation.
- S. Porter stated that there are many non-departmentalized programs.
- J. Locher stated that any department can allocate seats, but he can see that this is a problem.
- N. Romualdi stated he realized that allowing departments to allocate has significantly disadvantaged cross departmental programs and apologized for that.

#### 2023 Housing Program

- For this year, the intention is to ask for increased number of rooms from the allocation committee.
- Number of rooms is restricted by overall availability of rooms against guarantees.
- Options:
  - Go back to first come, first serve (which requires the least work).
  - Continue with the allocation model (this will provide the ability to support strategic priorities and subject-specific nuances), which is administratively labor-intensive.
  - Pilots with individual units to provide full guarantee.
- S. Hagerman recognized the quality of housing that is being offered; it is not year-round housing and it is very expensive to move. Regarding mature students, EDI priorities and family housing are also a concern as they are not part of this allocation process, which puts significant constraints on what can be achieved. This feedback was provided from the forestry program.
- N. Romualdi responded that one of the reasons seats were lost in the allocation was because some students' family status changed in relation to the application process, and later the housing they were offered did not suit them anymore. Some departments could not allocate all their seats because they had no eligible students that could take said seats.
- D. Clemens commented that his program had a 100% conversion rate on all offers for housing and it made a massive difference in the admissions process. He recommended having an intermediary to off load some of this administrative duty onto the unit itself in managing number of allocations per program; this intermediary would then have to coordinate with UBC housing by a certain date.
- J. Locher stated that UBC housing wants one intermediary. They need one go-to person, which G+PS fulfills the role for, and this cannot be changed. They are open to suggestions for ways to off load some of the work for each unit.
- J. Locher noted that no one in the Faculty meeting agreed on switching back to a first come, first serve model, and preferred to stick to the current allocation process for 2023.
- M. Gordon suggested that there are other allocation models, such as lotteries. J. Locher agreed that a lottery is an option.
- N. Romualdi stated that if a lottery were used, the program could not tell their students that it would be guaranteed housing.
- J. Locher stated that more options will be discussed.

#### St. John's College Expansion

- Potential for 1,500 beds; this is pending the capacity of site and amenities.
- Looking to include a large event space, 400 seats of dining, exercise facilities, etc.
- Context:
  - Lower Mall Precinct
  - "Graduate Student Precinct"
  - Campus Vision 2050
- The expansion is graduate student focused.
- Facilities/amenities will be determined as part of consultation.
- Timeline:
  - Currently they are developing an engagement plan.
  - Consultation will occur in October and November.
  - Board 1: March 2024.
  - Possible completion would be approximately 2028.
- Challenges for this expansion include funding and financial sustainability.





- Possible setup:
  - Expanded St. John's College includes: 330 single rooms, 20 accessible suites, 30 one bedrooms, and a common dining facility.
  - Residence portion includes:
    - 850 singles
    - 20 city homes (3 bedrooms) – flexibility (family, affiliated programming [Postdoc, Faculty member])
    - 75 two-bedroom suites – flexibility (2 UG, family, etc.)
    - 1 child care facility (37 spaces)
    - Self-contained

**9. ASSESSMENT OF UBC'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT AND MANAGE PROSPECTIVE ENQUIRIES – J. Locher & N. Romualdi**

This agenda item was skipped in the interest of time, and will be covered at the next meeting.

**10. GRADUATE STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT (GSFS) STUDY AND GRADUATE DATA UPDATES – J. Locher**

- The delivery of 2021/22 data will be within the next two weeks.
- Historical deliverables:
  - Release of U15 data in April the following year (e.g. April 2024 for 2022/23 data)
  - Summary sheet for doctoral level per unit
  - Case-level data upon request
  - Summary of public data file across all programs upon request
- Going forward:
  - Release of UBC data in November the same year (e.g. November 2023 for 2022/23 data)
  - Addition of master's level
  - Provision of case-level data without demographics
  - Provision of public data file across all programs by default
  - Case-level data including demographics upon request and justification
- The release of 2022/23 UBC data will be released in November 2023. U15 comparators continue to become available in April.
- S. Porter stated there will always be demographics/individuals that we do not have data for.

**11. GRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITMENT – S. Moore**

This agenda item was skipped in the interest of time, and will be covered at the next meeting.

**12. OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**13. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:03 pm.