

# Principles for Graduate Study at Ontario's Universities

Ontario Council on Graduate Studies

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## Ontario Council on Graduate Studies

These resolutions form a set of guiding principles for Graduate Studies in Ontario and were agreed to unanimously by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies in February 2016.

### Resolution 1.

That graduate education should operate in an atmosphere of academic freedom and open inquiry for faculty and for students. Individuals should be free to pursue knowledge, explore alternative theories and interpretations, and communicate research results without fear of reprisal.

### Resolution 2.

That graduate degrees should ensure that the holder has achieved an appropriate level of intellectual development beyond that acquired during the undergraduate program. For those programs that also serve the purpose of professional or vocational training, it is essential that the intellectual and professional objectives and content be more advanced than those of the undergraduate degree.

### Resolution 3.

Despite the variety in programming, master's degrees and graduate diplomas must include a component whereby research and analytical/interpretive skills are developed and demonstrated, such that it is ensured that every student meets the Master's degree level expectations concerning research and scholarship as defined by individual universities.

This research component is evidently present in the case of a thesis or major research paper requirement. Where degree requirements can be satisfied by course work alone, the onus should be on the program to demonstrate the elements which ensure the necessary graduate-level research component for all students. These may include one or more courses and other specified activity appropriate for the discipline and designed to test the acquisition and application of research and analytical/interpretive skills. Where there is not a single major research exercise required (e.g., a thesis or MRP), the program should demonstrate that the totality of small research assignments has the accumulated substance and coherence to constitute an appropriate graduate-level research component, and that all graduates have demonstrated that they meet the Master's degree level expectations concerning research and scholarship.

### Resolution 4.

Ontario's provincially assisted universities are committed to maintaining high quality graduate and professional programs and to admitting students who are best qualified and most likely to succeed in these programs.

The universities are autonomous and make individual decisions to determine their admission requirements. As enrollment in graduate and professional programs is typically limited in number by institutional and departmental capacity, it is not possible to accept everyone who applies. Thus many applicants who meet the minimum entrance requirements are not admitted to these programs.

Applicants to provincially assisted universities in Ontario are considered for admission on an individual basis in a process whereby the appropriate range of academic and other relevant evidence is weighed.

Each applicant is considered on his or her own merits, according to standards set by each institution, program by program.

### **Resolution 5. (The principle of timely program completion)**

OCGS members are committed to student success and timely program completion.

Full-time graduate students are expected to pursue their graduate degree on a full-time basis and make satisfactory progress toward timely completion of all program requirements. It is not possible, or desirable, for the university to monitor and enforce the employment activities of its graduate students outside the university. However, it is both possible and desirable for the university to ensure that it does not itself create a structural situation that jeopardizes the ability of the graduate student to make full-time progress towards the completion of graduate program requirements.

### **Resolution 6.**

That Ontario Graduate Scholarships (OGS) will be awarded to eligible master's students for a maximum of two academic years; eligible doctoral students<sup>1</sup> may hold the OGS award for a maximum of four academic years.<sup>2</sup> The Ontario Graduate Scholarship will not be awarded to doctoral students after their fourth year of study.

### **Resolution 7.**

That Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) graduate degree-level expectations will be applied in all approvals, including those of professional programs. Without limiting the full range of the standards outlined in the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) Quality Assurance Framework, these should include:

- a. Faculty qualifications, including appropriate academic credentials and appropriate research, scholarship and professional activities so as to demonstrate the required intellectual leadership and ability to supervise graduate students in the discipline or profession;

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to four-year PhD students entering following the completion of a master's degree, not transfer students or direct-entry doctoral students.

<sup>2</sup> OGS award maxima are outlined in the 2016-17 Ministry of Training, College and University OGS/QEII-GSST guidelines.

- b. Program requirements, including a research component appropriate to the degree level and to the discipline or profession; and
- c. Curricular content and level.

### Resolution 8.

That the name of a **“field”** should be concise and descriptive of the focus and intellectual coherence of its content. It should not be an essay, seeking to state explicitly every element included within the field, neither should it be a catch-all or residual category. The identification of fields is optional but when used, they declare areas of strength within the program; a field should not have the same name as the program as a whole. Each selected “field” will have a reasonable minimum number of active faculty who, together with the graduate students, create a learning community. This allows programs to indicate their strengths within reasonable boundaries, to underscore their distinctiveness and to respond to the needs of and changes in the discipline over time.

In coursework intensive programs (e.g. non-thesis master's programs) which identify fields, students should be able to count on the availability of at least one semester course every year in their field of primary interest.

### Resolution 9.

That **“core faculty”** are defined as those members of the graduate faculty who are institutionally-approved and who are expected to be involved in thesis supervision and/or involved in a graduate program through teaching courses.

It is reasonable and appropriate to expect that core faculty will provide intellectual leadership in the discipline or field even if they are teaching for professional preparation. In the university setting, leadership is demonstrated through personal, active and ongoing involvement in research, investigative, conceptual and/or theoretical activity and the dissemination of the results of this activity through, for example, print, publishing, recorded presentation or representation and/or adjudicated performances or exhibitions. It is also expected that intellectual leadership will be recognized, and sustained, through the application for, and the receipt of, peer-reviewed research grants and contract research awards.

### Resolution 10.

That where students may take the same program, or elements of a program, in an on-campus or alternative-delivery format, the minimum admission requirements or equivalencies, intended learning outcomes, program requirements and standards should be consistent between the two.

### Resolution 11.

That regardless of delivery format, programs should be taught by faculty who have the same or similar qualifications as those teaching on-campus programs.

## Graduate Diplomas

The Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Framework (OUQAF) has defined three types of graduate diplomas: Master's Level (Type 1); Master's and Doctoral Levels (Type 2); and

Master's and Doctoral Levels (Type 3). Types 1 and 2 are not stand-alone qualifications and, therefore, the standards that apply to them are those of their parent program(s). Type 3 diplomas are stand-alone programs.

## **Resolution 12.**

That regardless of the Type, a Graduate Diploma at the Master's level is awarded to students who have demonstrated the following:

### **1. Depth and breadth of knowledge**

A systematic understanding of knowledge, including, where appropriate, relevant knowledge outside the field and/or discipline, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.

### **2. Conceptual & methodological awareness/research and scholarship**

A conceptual understanding and methodological competence that:

- a) enables a working comprehension of how established techniques of research and inquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
- b) enables a critical evaluation of current research and advanced research and scholarship in the discipline or area of professional competence; and
- c) enables a treatment of complex issues and judgments based on established principles and techniques.

On the basis of that competence, has shown at least one of the following:

- a) the development and support of a sustained argument in written form; or
- b) originality in the application of knowledge.

### **3. Communication skills**

The ability to communicate issues and conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

### **4. Application of knowledge**

Competence in the research process by applying an existing body of knowledge in the critical analysis of a new question or of a specific problem or issue in a new setting.

### **5. Professional capacity/autonomy**

Professional development is often a primary component of graduate diplomas, and will involve:

- a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment or further education, including:
  - i) The exercise of initiative, and of personal responsibility and accountability; and
  - ii) decision-making in complex professional situations;
- b) The intellectual independence required for continuing professional development;
- c) The ethical behaviour consistent with academic and professional integrity; and

- d) The ability to appreciate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

## **6. Awareness of limits of knowledge**

Cognizance of the complexity of knowledge and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods and disciplines.

## **Resolution 13.**

That regardless of the Type, a Graduate Diploma at the PhD level is awarded to students who have demonstrated the following:

### **1. Depth and breadth of knowledge**

A thorough understanding of a substantial body of knowledge that is at the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice, including, where appropriate, relevant knowledge outside the field and/or discipline.

### **2. Conceptual & methodological awareness/research and scholarship**

- a) The ability to conceptualize, design and implement research for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the research design or methodology in the light of unforeseen problems;
- b) The ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, sometimes requiring new methods;
- c) The ability to produce original research or other advanced scholarship of a quality to satisfy peer review and to merit publication.

### **3. Communication skills**

The ability to communicate complex and/or ambiguous ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

### **4. Application of knowledge**

The capacity to:

- a) Undertake pure and/or applied research at an advanced level;
- b) Contribute to the development of academic or professional skills, techniques, tools, practices, ideas, theories, approaches and/or materials.

### **5. Professional capacity/autonomy**

- a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex situations;
- b) The intellectual independence required for continuing professional development;
- c) The ethical behaviour consistent with academic integrity and the use of appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct of research;
- d) The ability to appreciate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

## **6. Awareness of limits of knowledge**

An appreciation of the limitations of one's own work and discipline, of the complexity of knowledge, and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines.

## **Master's Degrees**

Graduate study at the master's levels is offered through a diverse range of programs that are thesis-oriented, course-based, or professional.

### **Resolution 14.**

That regardless of the program type, the degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated the following:

#### **1. Depth and breadth of knowledge**

A systematic understanding of knowledge, including, where appropriate, relevant knowledge outside the field and/or discipline, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which are at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.

#### **2. Research and scholarship**

A conceptual understanding and methodological competence that:

- a) enables a working comprehension of how established techniques of research and inquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
- b) enables a critical evaluation of current research and advanced research and scholarship in the discipline or area of professional competence; and
- c) enables a treatment of complex issues and judgments based on established principles and techniques.

On the basis of that competence, has shown at least one of the following:

- a) development and support of a sustained argument in written form; or
- b) originality in the application of knowledge.

#### **3. Level of application of knowledge**

Competence in the research process by applying an existing body of knowledge in the critical analysis of a new question or of a specific problem or issue in a new setting.

#### **4. Professional capacity/autonomy**

- a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - i) exercise of initiative and of personal responsibility and accountability; and
  - ii) decision-making in complex situations;
- b) The intellectual independence required for continuing professional development;

- c) The ethical behaviour consistent with academic integrity and the use of appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct of research; and
- d) The ability to appreciate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

### **5. Level of communications skills**

The ability to communicate ideas, issues and conclusions clearly.

### **6. Awareness of limits of knowledge**

Cognizance of the complexity of knowledge and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines.

## **Doctoral Degrees**

Independent original research, the preparation of a thesis, and its successful defense are considered to be the essential core of doctoral studies. However, because thesis research is highly specialized, it is important that some mechanism be in place to ensure that breadth of knowledge and skills are acquired by doctoral students. This objective can be achieved by course work, participation in colloquia, a comprehensive examination or other means.

Two types of doctoral degrees are offered in Ontario universities, the PhD and the practice-based doctoral degrees that are designated by the name of the discipline (e.g., EdD in Education, Mus.Doc. in Music, DVSc in Veterinary Science). Both types have a requirement for research, but research in the practice-based degrees is generally of an applied nature, related to a professional or creative activity.

Both types of doctorates can be distinguished from second entry professional programs, such as the MD, DDS, OD, or DVM, in that appropriate advanced training is required for admission and research is an integral and necessary component of the degree requirement.

### **Resolution 15.**

That the doctoral degree extends the skills associated with the Master's degree and is awarded to students who have demonstrated:

#### **1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge**

A thorough understanding of a substantial body of knowledge that is at the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice including, where appropriate, relevant knowledge outside the field and/or discipline.

#### **2. Research and Scholarship**

- a) The ability to conceptualize, design, and implement research for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the research design or methodology in the light of unforeseen problems;
- b) The ability to make informed judgments on complex issues in specialist fields, sometimes requiring new methods; and
- c) The ability to produce original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to



satisfy peer review, and to merit publication.

### **3. Level of Application of Knowledge**

The capacity to:

- a) Undertake pure and/or applied research at an advanced level; and;
- b) Contribute to the development of academic or professional skills, techniques, tools, practices, ideas, theories, approaches, and/or materials.

### **4. Professional Capacity/autonomy**

- a) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex situations;
- b) The intellectual independence to be academically and professionally engaged and current;
- c) The ethical behaviour consistent with academic integrity and the use of appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct of research; and
- d) The ability to evaluate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

### **5. Level of Communication Skills**

The ability to communicate complex and/or ambiguous ideas, issues and conclusions clearly and effectively.

### **6. Awareness of Limits of Knowledge**

An appreciation of the limitations of one's own work and discipline, of the complexity of knowledge, and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines.

## **Collaborative Specializations**

### **Resolution 16.**

A Collaborative Specialization is an intra-university graduate field of study that provides an additional multidisciplinary experience for students enrolled in and completing the degree requirements for one of a number of approved masters and/or PhD programs. Students meet the admission requirements of and register in the participating (or "home") program but complete, in addition to the degree requirements of that program, the additional requirements specified by the Collaborative Specialization. The degree conferred is that of the home program, and the completion of the Collaborative Specialization is indicated by a transcript notation indicating the additional specialization that has been attained (e.g., MA in Political Science with specialization in American Studies).

### **Resolution 17.**

That the additional value of a Collaborative Specialization will in many cases result from course requirements additional to the degree requirements of the home programs, but may in some cases result from other aspects such as the multidisciplinary focus and exposure to other viewpoints, or from the topic of the thesis research.

### **Resolution 18.**

A Collaborative Specialization must have at least one core one-semester course that is foundational to the specialization and does not form part of the course offerings of any of the partner programs. This course must be completed by all students from partner programs registered in the specialization and provides an opportunity for students to appreciate the different disciplinary perspectives that can be brought to bear on the area of specialization. This course may serve as an elective in the student's home program.

### **Resolution 19.**

There must be clear and explicit requirements for each Collaborative Specialization. In programs requiring a major research paper, essay, or thesis, the topic must be in the area of the collaborative specialization. In course-only Master's programs, at least 30% of the courses must be in the area of specialization including the core course described above. Courses in the area of specialization may be considered electives in the home program.

### **Resolution 20.**

The core faculty of Collaborative Specializations are only those faculty members in the participating home programs who have an interest and expertise in the area of the collaborative specialization (this may include faculty appointed 100% to an interdisciplinary academic unit – for example, an Institute of American Studies – that provides the anchor for the specialization).

### **Resolution 21.**

That the governance structure of the Collaborative Specialization, normally, would involve a director and a program committee. A Collaborative Specialization must have in place appropriate administrative and academic oversight/governance to ensure requirements associated with the specialization are being met.

### **Resolution 22.**

Proposals for new Collaborative Specializations will follow the protocol for Major Modifications. Collaborative Specializations do not require separate MTCU funding approval since no BIUs are claimed.

## **Microcredentials**

Graduate-specific microcredentials are understood to be microcredentials designed specifically for graduate students. They are distinguished from other microcredentials by factors such as rigor, deep levels of learning, and higher competency thresholds, and by alignment with Graduate Degree Level Expectations.

### **Resolution 23.**

A graduate microcredential is understood to be a microcredential designed specifically for graduate students. It is a recognition of completion of a skills or learning program, as verified through assessment, that is shorter in length than traditional credentials. Learners can pursue a microcredential as a standalone credential or pursue it concurrently with a traditional graduate

program (diploma or degree). The skills required to be successful in the microcredential will be articulated. Entrance requirements may include enrolment as a current graduate student, or job experience equivalency related to the field of study. In some instances, and/or at some institutions, a microcredential may be transcriptable. New graduate microcredentials should align with some aspects of the Graduate Degree Level Expectations. Quality assurance processes should follow the COU principles that were submitted to The Ministry of Colleges and Universities in July 2021.

### **Resolution 24.**

A graduate micro-course/micro-program is a transcriptable academic credit at the graduate level that is shorter in duration than traditional courses/degrees. These credits can sometimes be stacked into other credentials. Admission requirements to micro-courses/micro-programs follow institutional graduate entrance requirements and may include any offering unit's requirements. If not registered in an existing graduate program, a student wishing to take a graduate micro-course/micro-program may enroll as a non-degree special student. Proposals for new micro-courses/micro-programs are approved through institutions' existing academic approval pathways for new courses and align with Graduate Degree Level Expectations.

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