

External High-Level Assessment of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at UBC Vancouver

Terms of Reference

February 3-4, 2025

In anticipation of fiscal headwinds for the University sector and in recognition of the changed context of higher education, the UBC President and UBC Vancouver Provost are endeavouring to focus the University and its funding on strengthening the core academic mission.

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) at UBC is, by definition, critical to our academic vision and mission. As a global top-40, research-intensive institution of higher education, UBC takes both its research and its pedagogical mission extremely seriously, and the graduate enterprise occupies the lynchpin role in these core activities.

Under the new UBC Vancouver Academic Unit External Review Guidelines (Faculty), a comprehensive review of a Faculty under Senate Guidelines (J-305) normally occurs near the end of the first five-year term of a dean. These reviews “[assess] the current state of the Faculty across all areas, including the range, depth, and quality of the Faculty’s operations and programs; [they] also consider the Faculty’s forward-looking strategies regarding scholarship, pedagogy, professional activities, and academic programs.” The last regular J-305 review of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies took place in 2018 in preparation for the consideration of Dean Susan Porter for a second full term. Dean Porter stepped down on December 31, 2023, and *pro tem* Dean Michael Hunt stepped into the role.

This current process is *not* structured as a formal review under policy J-305 (i.e., it is not intended primarily to assess the Faculty’s programs and weigh in on the quality of leadership). Rather, it is a high-level assessment intended to inform the President and Provost on the role of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for the Strategic Plan Refresh with a focus on the vision for graduate studies at UBC, as well as the structure of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the resources needed to fulfill its role. Fundamentally, we ask whether the current system of overseeing and supporting graduate studies at UBC provides faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with the very best possible conditions for research and learning.

In accord with this goal, there are a number of areas for which we would appreciate the reviewers’ perspectives, based on their review of material and their discussions on site, and we list these in the remit below. We recognize that it will not be possible to address all of these topics.

Evaluate how G+PS might most effectively carry out its mandate.

- Are the administrative structures and processes of the Faculty effective in meeting the needs of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, the University administration, and faculty members?
- Are the Faculty's policies and procedures for admissions, student management, and awards appropriate, up to date, and well managed? Do we have the right interface with Enrolment Services?
- Are the resources allocated to the Faculty sufficient to enable it to meet its responsibilities?
- Is there an alternative model to the current structure that would better address the mandate?

Determine the effectiveness of G+PS in promoting the welfare and success of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows within UBC.

- Are students and postdoctoral fellows adequately supported financially and academically?
- How can we best monitor the quality of supervision and examination of graduate students engaged in research and thesis production?
- How well does the Graduate Council represent the interests and concerns of faculty and graduate students?
- Can you comment on our mix of graduate students and the overall size of the enterprise?
- Should all graduate program offerings adhere to the same standards and oversight? If not, what options are available, and what supports (and from where) should they have access to?
- What supports are needed for the professional and personal development of graduate students and postdocs at UBC?

Consider the relationships and linkages between G+PS and UBC faculties and administrative units.

- How effective is G+PS in maintaining high standards in graduate and postdoctoral education across the University? Are those standards applied uniformly in all UBC graduate programs?
- Are the relationships between G+PS and other academic units positive and effective?
- Are the relationships between G+PS and relevant administrative units (offices of the Provost, including Enrolment Services; the VP Research; and the VP Students) positive and effective?
- Are the responsibilities of academic and administrative units to graduate students and postdoctoral fellows clearly distinguishable from those assigned to G+PS, or is there overlap and duplication beyond that necessary for quality assurance and support?
- What does the rest of the University perceive as strengths and weaknesses of G+PS?