

A Review of Graduate Studies Policies at the University of New Brunswick

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We appreciate the trust of this work to us by both the President and Vice President Research of the University New Brunswick and are sincerely grateful to those who have granted us interviews and ideas on the Graduate Studies program. We are also indebted to Amanda Manuel, Executive Assistant to the Office of the Vice President (Research), without whose diligence and commitment to sorting out a myriad of schedules, including ours, this review might not have happened.

We wish UNB all success in their sincere attempts to improve graduate studies processes and policies for the benefit of all concerned. We regret we could not interview more administrators of graduate studies and faculty generally, but working with a tight timeline, schedules of busy interviewees, and confident we had what we needed to complete the work, we hereby submit our report and recommendations.

GM and NG.

Mandate of this review

In late 2022 we were invited by the President to examine and assess the following areas in doctoral degree processes at the University of New Brunswick; what follows is the specific scope of this review.

An examination and assessment of the operations of graduate education at UNB in relation to:

- *Student acceptance into PhD programs*
- *Determination of supervisory arrangements*
- *Composition of assessment committees*
- *Selection of external examiners*
- *The management of perceived or actual conflict of interests in regard to any aspect of doctoral education, in particular assessment processes.*
- *Policies and processes regarding thesis examination*
- *Policies and protocols regarding students seeking theses publication embargoes.*
- *Policies and/or practices outlining procedural and behavioural expectations of members of supervisory and examination committees.*

The primary means for undertaking the review will involve an examination of current policies and practices at UNB. It is expected that the review team will be able to compare the policies and procedures at UNB to best practices undertaken at leading Canadian institutions. The reviewers will have access to all relevant policy and procedure documentation as well as access to interview key personnel involved in graduate education at UNB.

Method

We first examined policy documents regarding Graduate Studies as found on the UNB website and as directed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies (hereinafter SGS). After reviewing policies that appear hyperlinked in this document and considering both the mandate and the time allotted for the review, we developed questions to address the mandate and support focused conversations. These questions were asked of each interviewee:

- 1) What is the relationship with the University registrar regarding process/acceptance? Are there ever any conflicts between the Registrar's office and the SGS? If so, how are they resolved? (No interviewee reported any conflict of this type).
- 2) What is the ratio of faculty supervision to GS? (to determine workload/supervisory capacity)
- 3) Does the apparent absence of a universal regulation for the establishment of a Supervisory Committee lead to inconsistency or conflicts?
- 4) Who signs off on supervisory committees?
- 5) There appears to be no language governing the relationship between the Examining Board and Supervisory committee. Is this the case? Does this absence create the possibility of conflict of interest?
- 6) What is the possible rationale for an embargo for public dissemination of the thesis, given the speed of information currently? (although requests are reviewed and considered for approval by the Dean of SGS there is no timeline or mention of this review process as done on an annual basis or otherwise).
- 7) What is the status of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the University of New Brunswick?

With the assistance of the office of the Vice President (Research) we scheduled interviews with GS administrators at all levels as well as one recent graduate and one current doctoral student. A list of our interview subjects is appended to this report. In addition to the questions above, we referred to policy language or followed new threads of conversation with interviewees when it felt appropriate. We also followed up with questions and email exchanges in a number of cases.

Findings

Our findings revealed both general and specific issues around GS policies, which the report addresses directly. Challenges with specific programs were identified -- particularly the IDST PhD program -- and other issues that appeared to be most salient included some unevenness of practices across the university, communications deficits and resource capacity.

In addition, the best practices of a specific department also emerged. We address these matters and include recommendations throughout the document. When relevant, we name other universities and note some of their policies that may be useful to the University for comparative review on specific policies or themes. These appear throughout the document.

Some conversations reached beyond our remit and extended to broader institutional matters. We allude to some of these observations here but are mindful of honouring the terms of our engagement.

Note: Italics refer to written material, quotation marks refer to specific interview data.

Admissions

As typical of most Canadian universities, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) UNB is responsible for processing applications to graduate school. From the policy review there appears to be no complications in the process and the regulations governing application are clear. However, a number of concerns were raised related to admission to the PhD Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) program.

PhD Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) program

Some of our interviewees noted that students who might be denied entry into traditional programs are then accepted into IDST at the advice of a professor or two. These are students who in many cases were said to “fall between the cracks” of traditional disciplinary units. They are then perceived as weaker students, deservedly or not, because the common perception is that the criteria for acceptance to the IDST is not as rigorous as it is for other programs. We stress this point because, even if it’s not true, perceptions like this can damage the reputation of a program. The program is reported to have had a “checkered reputation” for some time. One interviewee noted the “pass requirements for the PhD defense in the program were not that high.” The bar, it was observed, was “low,” so that “by the time a PhD student gets as far as a final examination without adequate checks then it’s easier to pass them than not.”

The chart below provided by the Dean of Graduate Studies underscores the comments we heard from others about the program challenges, both in terms of numbers of students, comparable across program areas, and in rates of completion:

Time to Completion			
PHD PROGRAM	AvgDuration(Yrs)	StDevDuration(Yrs)	Number of Students
BIOL	5.66	1.96	94
CE	4.79	1.55	30
CHE	4.92	1.41	55
CHEM	4.64	1.67	32
CLPSY	6.74	2.37	47
CS	5.23	2.27	54
EDUST	5.78	1.68	60
EE	5.24	1.67	41
ENGL	6.47	2.61	21
ESCI	4.90	1.78	9
EXPSY	6.72	2.09	14
FOR	5.42	1.59	52
GEOG	5.63	2.74	21
GGE	5.51	2.01	38
HIST	7.04	2.94	31
IDST	5.39	2.02	50
MATH	5.56	1.26	21
ME	4.67	1.37	41
PHYS	5.75	1.57	20
PSYC	6.53	1.35	11
SOCI	6.62	2.74	18
Overall	5.68	1.94	760

Completion Rate			
PROGRAM	Graduated	Withdrawal	% Completion
BIOL	94	14	0.870
CE	30	15	0.667
CHE	59	22	0.728
CHEM	34	8	0.810
CLPSY	47	9	0.839
CS	57	39	0.594
EDUST	60	25	0.706
EE	41	33	0.554

ENGL	21	20	0.512
ESCI	9	3	0.750
EXPSY	15	4	0.789
FOR	54	25	0.684
GEOL	21	15	0.583
GGE	38	21	0.644
HIST	32	14	0.696
IDST	51	52	0.495
MATH	21	8	0.724
ME	41	26	0.612
PHYS	21	9	0.700
PSYC	11	24	0.314
SOCI	18	21	0.462
Overall	775	407	0.654

The ISTD, the Dean of SGS noted, “has one of the lowest completion rates (49.5%), which is considerably lower than the overall average of 65%.” Reasons for this include “the lack of a canonical faculty home” and “lack of grass-roots attention and care, namely around program structure, community, careful thorough processes for admission, funding, etc.”

While it is true that these are challenges any graduate interdisciplinary program faces, we did wonder why the program was so heavily subscribed. The cohort is unusually large (~50) for such a fragile framework. We also heard that these students often fall outside the graduate funding system, and are wholly dependent on a supervisor’s support, making for an uneven field of study for even the very best of recruits. That said, there appears from our interviews that there does not seem to be any Equity Diversity Inclusion lens (as per the Dimensions Charter, to which the University is a signatory) applied to the consideration of incoming graduate cohorts in the IDST programme, although this might vary from unit to unit.

Graduate student growth with a specific emphasis on international recruitment has been a driver of Canadian university recruitment for about two decades. This has generally been good for building robust and diverse learning and research communities across our campuses, but such growth is not without its challenges. Ensuring that students coming from other countries have the proper support in place is key to their success. Admitting them without such support, and without a clear delineation of their proposed program of study, is bound to generate problems for them and for the university.

We did ask our participants if faculty hiring has kept pace with the growth of the graduate student cohort, and we were told again and again that that has not been the case. Doctoral students are typically assigned a supervisor at admissions, but such a program, dependent on more than one disciplinary sphere, might warrant a stronger team of supervisors--or at least a co-supervisory team--at the outset, with a guarantee of support already in place.

Some Canadian universities insist that applications to their doctoral interdisciplinary studies programs identify a full team of supervisors related to their intended research project before admission can be processed. This team would sign off on their support for the project as part of the application process, not after registration.

We note the regulation regarding admission to the IDST is somewhat vague, the regulation is as follows:

When the program of study and research does not fit into an existing GAU or combination of GAUs, the candidate may apply to do an interdisciplinary degree under the Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) GAU of the SGS. Those interested in applying for such degrees should first consult with the Assistant Dean/Director of Graduate Studies for IDST programs in the SGS. ([here](#))

Interdisciplinary programs tend to be administered by the central graduate student unit, in this case the School of Graduate Studies at UNB. This makes sense as long as there is rigorous oversight of the program from the central office, often through the auspices of an associate dean, and in close communication with supervisory teams. Other universities (Dalhousie, Memorial, SFU), appoint interdisciplinary program coordinators or directors to assist with admissions, helping to establish supervisory teams, monitoring and reporting on the program, and keeping in close touch with the students, and hosting learning and social opportunities as a way of providing more of a sense of community or home. This idea might work at UNB as well.

This type of situation is not a unique situation at UNB comparable to other universities. The lack of a home for IDST plagues programs like this in many places. However, some universities provide physical space in which interdisciplinary students hang out and study.

IDST appears to float between units. Our recommendations deal with this specifically. We conceded that it is highly difficult to get IDST programs to have some consistency across the board, but the suggestion from one interviewee was to “theme” the areas of study that includes more than one unit and assess the possibility of a coordinator who takes care of applications across the campus as well producing a mission for this program. One suggestion from our interviews was that more focus on a themed intersection of departments might better suit the delivery of the program. Science faculties at UNBSJ appear to be doing this already with success.

It is clear that students are, as the expression goes, voting with their feet at some universities, applying to IDST programs for all kinds of reasons. It is also clear that students are increasingly fusing disciplines with each other, asking for more linked programs, even at the Bachelor’s level. IDST might be “the training of the future” according to one of our interviewees, so it seems to be important to pay attention to the manner in which it is done. Smaller numbers, more concentrated foci so that the students (if not the program) have a ‘home’ and consistency between those areas of foci would go a long way to ensure that students are well served.

Funding for IDST is paramount, and needs to be either externally obtained, or internally granted. For in the end, a well-served student becomes a reliable alumnus, which is every university’s

reputational dream. No university wants to see withdrawals or consistently unhappy or underserved doctoral candidates. This behaviour happens at the lower levels but should definitely not be happening at the doctoral level, as the risk level (financial, familial, reputational and career) is quite high for these students. If at all possible, doctoral students should be consistently treated equitably by the University.

Finally, we wish to note the SGS Dean's comments that "IDST gets some of our very best students -- lots of TriCouncil awardees, including a number of our few Vanier awardees."

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.

1.2 RECOMMENDATION – that acceptance criteria be published in the same place as the regular doctoral programs.

1.3 RECOMMENDATION - that the IDST program has clearer administrative oversight and program delivery.

1.4 RECOMMENDATION – that funding be provided for the PhD.ISTD program equitably comparable to other programmes across both campuses.

1.5 RECOMMENDATION - that supervision and program delivery to IDST students be standardized.

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.

Graduate Studies Supervision and Assessment Committees

We are approaching the determination of supervisory arrangements and the composition of assessment committees as a cluster because the observations we heard and the recommendations we suggest carry over into both areas.

The School of Graduate Studies issued the Graduate Manual in October 2022 to act as a helpful resource for Directors of Graduate Studies, their GAUs, and graduate students. This document is intended to be used in addition to the general regulations governing doctoral programs. We note that such manuals are now common across Canadian graduate schools, as is the annual progress review form that compels graduate student and supervisor to sign off on the benchmarking of progress through the program. One interviewee said the "annual review process is hated and resisted ...although these are opportunities to recognize problems students are having well in advance of" late stages in their program.

The heavy lifting for the determination of supervisorial arrangements falls to the Director of Graduate Studies (DOGS) in their units. Among their extensive duties are *advising and assisting in the constitution of student committees for supervision and examination, and in the process of recommending External Examiners for student theses*. We assume these committees for each student are submitted to the School of Graduate Studies which would also have a record of the annual progress report, although it is not clear if that is the case. The Director does serve as *a liaison between the GAU and the SGS*. We heard repeatedly that Directors neither meet with nor routinely share best practices with each other.

We heard that some units are slow to put supervisory committees together, some well after the time a student has been admitted. We believe that a deadline for committee composition or a limit by which time such committees need to be in place would be helpful. One person noted that “some students do not even know who their supervisor is,” and that “no one supervises supervisors.”

In our interviews with graduate studies administrators and faculty across both campuses, we heard repeatedly that communications among Directors, the School of Graduate Studies, and often Associate Deans/Deans was fragmented. It appears that as rich in information as the Graduate Manual might be, not everyone turns to it for guidance, nor does the manual offer solutions to some of the problems that routinely emerge in graduate programs, many of which could benefit from in-person conversations and the sharing of information among different units. Unfortunately, many of these problems have to do with breakdowns of communication or supervisory style between supervisor and student including a lack of attention or uneven support, or, in worst cases, indifferent supervision.

“There really isn’t the opportunity for GAUs to listen to each other, learn from each other,” one subject said. It would be valuable “in having open discussion about what’s working and what’s not,” perhaps following executive meetings of the School of Graduate Studies. Moreover, we heard that some Directors are not “up to speed on procedures.” We wondered what sort of onboarding or mentoring exists for Directors, besides pointing them to the Graduate Manual. Might there be an orientation session, at least annually, for new Directors? These questions echo concerns from the interviewees.

We did hear that some GAUs have more formal processes in place for tracking committees and final examination procedures, and the Department of Chemistry kept emerging in conversation as a model example in this regard. It appears that Chemistry includes contact with prospective students, clear delineation of who is on the supervisory committee and who does what, providing everything the student needs (or encouraging them to apply for appropriate funding), and mentoring them from the very beginning and throughout the course of their program. Further, the department does not seem to exceed its capacity by overloading supervisors. We heard this from more than one interviewee and then separately from a former graduate of the department now working in industry. As well, GAUs that require accreditation, such as Psychology, tend to have good tracking documentation for their programs. There is, as some noted, a “lot of trust in individual units to be handling things well.” Indeed, some GAUs are straightforward in their delineation of supervisory committees; however, some are not.

Further to the subject of communications, we heard from several sources that faculty deans are not included in the conversation about graduate student requirements, such as space and funding needs. Despite this, these Associate Deans/Deans might be faced with foregone conclusions regarding a student's-supervisor's demands. Further, there is also "great disparity across campus and campuses," without a view to financial support.

One bold suggestion, rarely uttered in the academy anywhere, is that there needs to be a "redistribution of wealth"—richer units helping less fortunate units—with support to ensure equity. (The IDST, it was noted in the same conversation, is "totally iniquitous.") This remarkable suggestion speaks to a wider conversation beyond the remit of this report, but we felt we needed to include it here. Questions that arose in this context in conversation include should GAUs be organized more thematically—less tied to discipline-based departments—and therefore more in keeping with the trend towards interdisciplinarity. It does suggest the idea that GAUs may need to be completely reconfigured.

2.1 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies establish a deadline by which time supervisory committees should be determined in each unit.

2.2 RECOMMENDATION The doctoral admission policy takes into account the University's supervisory capacity in any given admissions cycle.

2.3 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies establish annual orientation workshops for new Directors.

2.4 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate studies host annual workshops for Directors of GAUs to share best practices and challenging situations.

2.5 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies assess inequities in GAU support and student funding across both campuses to remedy this issue.

2.6 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate Studies aims for more communication and transparency across both campuses.

External Examiners, Conflicts of interest, Thesis examination

We recognize that the majority of final examinations at UNB are enacted smoothly and without conflict, but we did hear a concentration of concern about unevenness of practice, of inadequate guidelines or oversight in the establishment of committees, and the potential for students to be caught in the centre of conflicts between supervisory committee members or as the result of less-than-ideal procedures.

We discovered that the regulations are clearer regarding the establishing the members of the Examining Board than they are for supervisory committees, which is not uncommon for

Canadian universities; some individual units sometimes inscribe their own committee arrangements directly into their calendar regulations. This is true at UNB as it is elsewhere.

From [here](#):

Appointed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the GAU concerned, the Examining Board acts on behalf of the SGS and consists of the candidate's supervisor(s) and three other members of the School of Graduate Studies, at least one of whom must be from the candidate's GAU and at least one of whom must be from another GAU. In addition, there will be an external examiner from outside the University of New Brunswick.

The constitution of the Examining Board should be as follows:

Internal Examiner(s) - Supervisor(s)

Internal Examiner from the student's GAU

Internal Examiner from the student's GAU, or from another GAU at UNB

Internal Examiner from another GAU at UNB

External Examiner (outside of UNB)

Examiners 2-4 may (but need not) be members of the Supervisory Committee; and Examiner 4 may also be external to UNB.

Selection of External Examiner: The Director of Graduate Studies will provide names and contact information for three nominees for the position of External Examiner (on the memorandum for membership on the Examining Board). The Director (but NOT the Supervisor) may make an informal approach to nominees to canvas their willingness and availability to serve. Where the Director also has some involvement with the dissertation, the Chair of the Department, or Dean of Faculty, or designate in the decanal structure, should make this informal contact with nominees for External Examiner. Every precaution must be taken to avoid potential conflicts of interest; hence, the Conflict-of-Interest form must be signed and submitted to the SGS verifying that there are no conflicts.

Some of our interviewees told us that they “did not realize that three names needed to be submitted” for supervisory board consideration; others noted that they rarely submit more than one. One person noted the three-person rule “often gets forgotten.” We concluded that the observation of this regulation seems to be uneven. One interviewee would like to see “more harmonization across the board,” more “uniformity” regarding the establishment of examination boards, while acknowledging the need to balance the autonomy of units against more consistency.

It is both good and appropriate to have a conflict-of-interest form for the PhD External Examiner ([here](#)), although it is interesting that the same form does not have to be signed by other members of the examining board. The form itself is open-ended in its framing of this conflict: *Being involved in collaborative activities, including but not limited to publishing or participating*

together on grants or contracts. Many universities define a qualifying length of time during which the subjects ought not to have collaborated, from five to ten years. We suggest that all members of the examining board sign a conflict-of-interest form, in order to establish that they are not in conflict with each other. We are of the view that the potential for conflict-of-interest is greatest with members of the supervisory committee, who also serve as voting members of the board. By definition, anyone fitting this description is already in a conflict-of-interest position with the student as the supervisory committees are acting as advocates on behalf of the student examined.

It is a curious fact of Canadian university graduate studies examining board regulations that supervisors often sit as voting members of the board. We note that this is out of the question in many parts of the world, particularly in the UK and Australia. And in some Canadian universities, supervisors may sit as non-voting observers of the final examination.

In 2006, then Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Calgary, Dr. Fred Hall, was invited by the Canadian Association of Graduate Schools (CAGS) to survey Canadian practices related to the examination of PhD theses. His report can be found [here](#). Dr. Hall's recommendations stressed the Australian "Framework" as the model for best practices. A further discussion on the excellent points of this report appears in Appendix I.

Scanning the regulatory frameworks of Canadian universities in 2023, it is apparent to us that little has changed since Dr. Hall's report was filed, despite its excellent recommendations. Many—not all—universities seem reluctant to have changed their practices to ensure there was no conflict of interest on their examining boards. We determine that his survey of variations in definitions of conflict of interest is also well worth a look.

In our own conversations with UNB administrators and students, the subject of conflict of interest arose, not so much in terms of supervisory participation on examining committees—a novel idea to most—but more directly in terms of external examiners being too familiar with supervisors or having worked on recent collaborative projects. Some commented about the "cherry picking" of examiners, about "favour trading," and about "stacked committees." Some also complained about people being appointed to examination boards who did not possess the "expertise to examine" the thesis appropriately. "The whole process can be contaminated by rushing things, trying to get it all done." And it was also noted that there are sometimes "conflicts between committee members well before the defense itself."

These perceptions, whether real or not, undermine the integrity of SGS itself at UNB. Several pointed out that UNB ought to be mindful of following the Tri-Agency conflict-of-interest guidelines in all matters ([here](#)). We believe this to be a sound suggestion.

Dr. Hall's report also focused on the need to establish criteria for the appointment of external examiners, criteria which are sorely lacking in many Canadian universities and only vaguely defined at UNB. He pointed then as we do now to the University of Victoria which has an excellent checklist of such criteria, well worth adopting. It is [here](#).

One recurring theme was that small departments, and even some larger ones with narrow-subject theses, lacked the personnel to establish appropriately resourced examination boards. It would follow that “stacking committees” becomes an accepted way of covering off examination obligations. This is a problem not unique to UNB, but it does raise the question of whether the university and the School of Graduate Studies is regularly reviewing its responsibilities to students who might be admitted without consideration of the long-term capacity of supervisory and examining resources.

3.1 RECOMMENDATION – that the conflict-of-interest form be revised for clarity and with a view to best practices (Tri-Agency).

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.

3.3 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate studies consider removing members of supervisory committees as voting participants from final examination committees.

3.4 RECOMMENDATION – that the School of Graduate studies develop a stronger set of criteria for the appointment of external examiners.

Policies and protocols on student publication embargoes

We were surprised to see that UNB has a policy of allowing embargoing doctoral theses for a period of up to four years. (“The maximum allowable total duration is four years”: [here](#)) Interviewees we spoke with were also surprised that the term was that long. Our review found that it is unusual for schools of graduate studies in Canada to allow such a lengthy embargo period. For example:

UBC: *If there is strong justification, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies may agree to delay publication of a thesis/dissertation (known as an "embargo") for twelve months. Under special circumstances, and with substantive rationale, the delay in publication may be extended to a normal maximum of two years.*

UAlberta: *It is University policy that a thesis be made freely available to the public as soon as possible after a student's convocation. A general policy of “open access” is also embraced by Tri-Council and other funding agencies. However, it is recognized that circumstances may arise that justify restricting access to a thesis for a specified period of time initially up to a maximum of one year (also known as an embargo period). The student's department has been delegated the authority to receive and approve a request for restricting access to a thesis for up to two years.*

UToronto: *In exceptional cases, the author, in consultation with the thesis supervisor and with the approval of the chair of the graduate unit, shall have the right to postpone*

distribution and publication for a period up to two years from the date of acceptance of the thesis. Discuss placing an embargo on your thesis with your supervisor.

UWindsor: *If a thesis, major paper, or dissertation contains material which needs to be withheld temporarily from the public or the community of scholars for a variety of valid reasons (e.g., publication pending, patent pending, etc.), the candidate and their research supervisor(s) may request a period of withholding from circulation as follows:*

- *six months without cause being given;*
- *up to 1 year with good cause, as determined by the Faculty of Graduate Studies;*
- *more than 1 year: requires explicit approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies*

York University allows up to three years with special permission, but we could find no university that allows more than that, and in each and every case permission must be granted by the Dean of the School of the Graduate Studies following submission with reasons of a formal request. Extensions to the original request are rare and only granted in extreme circumstances, well justified.

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 permission of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies.

Policies and Practices on Expectations of Policies of members of supervisory and examination committees

There are many good policies on procedural and behavioural expectations of members of supervisory and examination committees (Waterloo and U d’Ottawa come to mind). It is imperative that procedural expectations of supervisory and examination committees be commensurate with each other. As we indicated above, it appears that examining committees' policies have more consistency than do supervisory committees. This is not unusual, given that examinations are the final stage of a doctoral student’s affiliation with the university. Supervisory committees, however, need to have some measure of consistency as well.

As we outline in earlier recommendations, it is important to adhere to the same guidelines for all. We suspect that when guidelines aren’t adhered to, the explanations are familiar ones, as we heard: “it’s a matter of a lack of faculty supervisory availability”; “usually, it’s the same faculty all the time supervising, it’s not really fair, but some people simply don’t want to do it”; “some faculty always put their hand up for this, but they are not always the best choices for supervisors”; “there appears to be few consequences for bad behaviour on the part of the supervisor”; and there’s a “feeling that the process is rushed” especially around examination boards. There is” no guaranteed credit for supervision in the Collective Agreement” (we were told supervisory credit appears in the Senate regulations but may be unevenly applied). It does speak to why already busy faculty may not take on a doctoral student, a commitment that stretches over years, if there is little or no recognition for doing so.

These comments may be taken as passing observations, but they raise issues that probably require attention. Further, these challenges aren't insurmountable. More dialogue on best practices among all the levels of those accountable at each level -- DOGS, Assistant Deans/Associate Deans, faculty, SGS Deans -- need to happen with some regularity, as does some onboarding of those who get the most questions (arguably, the DOGS), and a direct communication channel between the Dean of SGS and the faculty Deans should be established. One interviewee commented, "Resources are limited and uneven for graduate students," and "UNB is a very siloed place." Both of these issues bear deeper discussion for the groups we have named and would go a long way towards ending the perception of 'silos.'

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

It appears that although the University has signed the Dimensions Charter ([NSERC - Dimensions - Charter - Charter endorsers \(nserc-crsng.gc.ca\)](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Dimensions-Charte-Charte_endorsers)) it came up more than a few times with interviewees that "it is only recently that women have been present in any number in senior administrative positions" and that "most of the IDST programme admittees are international students, resulting in uneven equity across campus in financial support and in quality supervision". We were told of "housing and childcare concerns of IDST doctoral candidates" as well as the "perception of being treated differently than those students in other programs". These issues were considered to have an impact on the perception of the quality of the doctoral candidates (specifically in IDST) and potentially an uneven burden on these students compared to other doctoral programmes.

Although most units approach the work of supervision and mentoring of doctoral candidates with good intentions, it appears to us that a lack of an equity analysis may prohibit the ability to make positive changes in this regard. Although we note that this specific issue is beyond our remit, we feel compelled to report it in this document.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1 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.

Given the comments shared during interviews, we feel that even a simple review may expose and support the deep concerns of our interviewees in this regard.

In sum, we feel that most of the salient issues from our review are doable by the University. We perceived genuine concern regarding the current situation of doctoral graduate students and at the same time, a willingness by all those interviewed to offer suggestions for remedy.

We commend this document to the University, as a possible way forward for doctoral graduate studies at UNB.

Appendix I

Dr. Fred Hall report to Canadian Association of Graduate Students on Canadian practices related to the examination of PhD theses.

On the matter of establishing examining boards, Dr. Hall wrote:

The “Framework” is explicit about the supervisor’s role: “The supervisor must not be an examiner.” This statement appears under the heading for conflict of interest, so one might infer that the supervisor is deemed to have an unavoidable conflict of interest. (This exclusion is also a possible explanation for why there is little emphasis in the “Framework” on conflict of interest between the external and the supervisor.) Practice varies within Canada on the role of the supervisory committee in the exam, but the great majority allow the supervisor to be part of the examining committee.... The majority of institutions permit all members of the supervisory committee to be part of the oral examining committee.

Dr Hall relied on an influential 2004 publication, *The Doctoral Examination Process: A Handbook For Students, Examiners And Supervisors*, by Penny Tinkler and Carolyn Jackson, two UK-based academics who wrote about “how difficult it can be to ensure that there is no relationship between the supervisor and the external given memberships in discipline-based associations and even professional working groups.” Dr. Hall concluded his 2006 report this way:

The existence of such a Framework in Australia can serve as an incentive to Canadian institutions to develop similar documents – where agreement can be found. It is intriguing that there has been so little discussion of practices in Canada, given the amount of discussion and publication on the topic in Australia and the UK. Practices in Canadian universities differ in important respects, but each institution can benefit from knowing what the others are doing, and from a discussion of the reasons for the differences in practice.