

College Priorities

Enhancing Experiences | Creating Community | Developing Flexibility

I continue to be inspired by the energy and endurance I have seen in staff, students, and faculty as they adapted and took up new challenges. One of these challenges is to provide funding to students whose research has been significantly disrupted. Our new normal of how we work during and post pandemic is all about flexibility. Our team is working remotely, are connected to each other and continue to be committed to you, our stakeholders.

I have been engaged over the past few months in many conversations about the need for stable and predictable student funding, a sustainable and progressive governance model and about opportunities to create a community of graduate and postdoctoral studies best practice. As the college enters its 75th year, we will reflect on what has come before and how graduate education has evolved in Canada and the current mood of accelerating the change considering the world as it is now, technology-enabled, and flexible. January was marked by two new additions to the leadership team at CGPS, [Marc Usunier](#), Director of Programs and Operations and [Dr. Ryan Walker](#), Associate Dean. Together, we will elevate the reputation of graduate education at USask by staying focused on our priorities and our commitment to excellence in graduate and postdoctoral programming.

Enhancing Experiences

- The Council of Canadian Academics recently released a report from their Expert Panel on the Labor Market Transition of PhD Graduates "[Degrees of Success](#)". The report points to the need to reform the PhD to better align with the skill sets required by future employers including increasing opportunities for work integrated learning. Putting a priority on work-integrated learning and experiential learning at all levels builds skills in our students and can be instrumental for them in transitioning to desirable careers. Andrew Hartmann (PhD candidate, Applied Social Psychology) recently shared his experience researching and creating The Grad Hub as a practicum and continues to contribute to its development. The [Grad Hub](#), a unique and highly collaborative grad student onboarding platform is a centralized location of synthesized critical information for incoming and current graduate students. Thematic in approach, the one-stop-shop approach helps students build their individual development plan (IDP) while providing opportunities to connect with each other. I look forward to building on this platform to fully integrate career development for graduate students.

To model the way, we will continue to create similar opportunities for more students to be employed by us engaging our own students in our strategic projects through employment as student assistants. I am pleased to announce we recruited Oxana Pimenova (PhD Candidate, Public Policy), to work with us on the review of the College Governance.

- The Recruit Admissions Systems (RMS) was launched September 2020 and nearing completion. To date, we have received 13,997 applications; of which 6,094 are ready for review for fall 2021. The application pressure is a very positive indicator.
- On the quality assurance front, the program reviews that were paused when the pandemic began moved ahead in November and December with virtual site visits. The conversations I had with each of the review committees were engaging as they brought their personal and institutional perspectives and I look forward to receiving the reports. I am very grateful for the time and effort of our colleagues to provide us with the important feedback on the directions of our programs and to those of you who crafted the self-studies.

Creating Community

- In pursuit of change that actively decolonizes and Indigenizes college policies, practices and programs and supports the graduate community in making concrete steps as acts of reconciliation, I gathered a preliminary group to advise me on approaching a College Indigenous strategy starting with entry pathways for mature students who lack traditional undergraduate credentials. A GSF for a student to join this group will be announced shortly as well as more details of its activity.
- The college continues development of a community of collaborators in the pursuit of graduate excellence.
 - Workshops developed to support faculty transitioning to online learning through a collaboration with the GMCTL, Dean Keith Willoughby, Master Teacher. 56 faculty attended.
 - We continue to develop [resources](#) pages to serve college faculty
 - Regular virtual forums are held with graduate administrators, chairs, and Associate Deans grad in a collaborative virtual space, promoting, and finding opportunities for CGPS to support programs and students.
- As part of building a strong relationship with the Government of Saskatchewan, I had the opportunity January 18th to meet (virtually) with the new Saskatchewan Minister of Education Gene Makowsky along with a few other Deans. I look forward to building on this first conversation of how investment in graduate students aligns with provincial growth plan to attract and retain talent in Saskatchewan.
- We took a slightly different approach to consulting with students on tuition and I joined many College Deans/School Executive Directors in more intimate meetings with their students ahead of a grad student town hall. As different as the situation is in Medicine to SENS to Arts and Science, the theme of the high cost of living in Saskatoon and the importance for students to predict their expenses prevailed and informed my recommendations to the Deans and the Provost on tuition.

Grad News

- PSAC graduate student employment approved employment agreement. [Updates](#)

Upcoming Events

- CGPS Council Meeting Feb 9 [Register](#)
- Grad Connect Café Feb 10 [every Wednesday](#)
- Grad Admin Forum Feb 24
- PDF Career Days March 4 & 11
- Monthly [Meet Ups](#) for Postdocs
- Partner & College Events [Calendar](#)



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Developing Flexibility and Pandemic Response Update

Since last October and my last report, we have been through a rise and more recently a decline in cases counts in the city and province. We welcomed many new domestic and international students of which at least 30 were helped by ISSAC who endured travel restrictions and quarantine to begin the studies here in Saskatoon. **22 new, 8 returning students.**

The start of winter term classes was delayed a week providing students more time away from courses and instructors and teaching assistants more time to prepare courses for winter term. The sector-wide decision to continue primarily remote course delivery for spring/summer was announced already, and we anticipate the decision on fall term to be made in May. The situation continues to evolve with the rise of new COVID19 variants and increased travel restrictions. I will ensure CGPS staff are equipped to support programs and students through these unpredictable times.

- A total of **678 students** have deferred between March 13, 2020 and February 1, 2021; **167 leaves** have been processed. The delivery of remote classes has increased uptake of students taking advantage of graduate level classes with us and at partner institutions through the [Western Dean's Agreement](#). In 20-21, **53 students** registered through Western Deans, a **↑ 77 %** from last year. We are also seeing an increased trend in non-degree students taking courses.



FIGURE 1 GRAD STUDENT STUDY LOCATIONS

- We saw an increase in NSERC PhD; the SSHRC applications were down; CGSM will be adjudicated shortly with offers expected by April 1, 2021. Tri-Agency Doctoral successful applicants will be announced end of April, SSHRC announcements expected the first week in May.

Some changes are likely temporary such as:

- Extended flexibilities for admissions/deferrals and scholarships
- The extra financial supports such as the upcoming pandemic research disruption supplement
- That former international students who hold or held a PGWP will have the opportunity to apply for an open work permit. [News Release](#)

Other changes may be more durable such as:

- Temporary acceptance of Duolingo as an alternative language-proficiency assessment was extended and will be considered as a permanent alternative.
- **430** theses successfully defended remotely (Mar 13, 20 – Feb 1, 21) without incident speaks to the possibility of keeping virtual defences as an option with ever improving video-conferencing tools.
- **60 students** attended USask's first virtual graduate recruitment fair held Nov 18, 20. Two more are scheduled for the winter, one focused on Indigenous graduate students.
- The College continues to leverage remote working conditions to create a virtual graduate community.
- We are also working to understand what altered procedures and leniency for policies we should continue informed by our discussions with students and Grad Chairs.



CGPS Adapting to the New Normal _1 [click the icon to open 'what we have heard']