

College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies Plan 2025 Report Card & Update



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

College of Graduate
and Postdoctoral Studies

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

In lieu of the typical annual Dean's report, I provide you this update on the College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies' strategic plan.



Guided by the University of Saskatchewan's four principles of sustainability, diversity, connectivity, and creativity, the college continues to make progress within our three aspirational areas: *Achieving Inclusive Academic Excellence*, *Creating Knowledge and Skills*, and *Rejuvenating Relationships*.


I am immensely proud and grateful of the commitments and contributions made by our staff, the many volunteers who serve on our Standing Committees and Working Groups, the ongoing engagement of Graduate Chairs, Administrators, and faculty as we move the dial to bring our college to the forefront of graduate education in Canada and on the world stage.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. B. ...'.

INTRODUCTION

CGPS is uniquely woven into the University of Saskatchewan; shared values and partnerships are essential for college success. The guiding principles in the CGPS plan are collegiality, progressiveness, and to be aspirational, and the plan prepares the college to respond to new generations of students.

This CGPS Plan that was created in 2018 identified themes to guide our work. The plan stated goals to elevate our profile on and off campus and contribute to the significance and value of graduate education at the University of Saskatchewan. The plan was built to align with the principles of sustainability, diversity, connectivity, and creativity embodied by the University Plan 2025. We aspire to the themes: **Be Bold; Be Ambitious**.

Spring 2022 marks a midpoint and an important inflection point for Plan 2025. Since the launch of the plan in 2018, CGPS has seen significant changes in leadership, adjusted to operating in the pandemic and the need to respond to institutional priorities for equity, decolonization, and reconciliation. In this document, we report tremendous progress toward the original goals of the plan. We also refresh and reframe aspects of the plan to further align the college's priorities with the institution and the evolving environment in which we operate. Watch for orange text to highlight **Indigenization** and  for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) items.

2025 ASPIRATIONS

ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE by mobilizing and reinforcing exceptional graduate student experiences. The CGPS will facilitate and support **growth** of its student body; strengthen its **services** by adopting a strategic approach to recruitment, enrolment, and retention; and discover ways to be **flexible** through updating policies and procedures.

CREATING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS that take graduate students beyond traditional degree outcomes and support them as scholars to be global contributors prepared for a variety of career paths. CGPS will look for ways to challenge the status quo through program **innovation**, elevating equity, decolonization, and work toward lasting **impact** on our community and future graduates.

REJUVENATE RELATIONSHIPS to embolden and activate USask's internal and external graduate community. CGPS will bolster its value proposition, share its **story**, and look for ways to connect USask's graduate **community** in a vibrant community of practice.

ASPIRATION ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE by mobilizing and reinforcing exceptional graduate student experiences. The CGPS will facilitate and support *growth* of its student body; strengthen its *services* by adopting a strategic approach to recruitment, enrolment, and retention; and discover ways to be *flexible* through updating policies and procedures.

GOAL 1: COMMIT TO ROBUST STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Progress:

Admissions: RMS Recruit system fully implemented in 2021/22 to include preapplication feature.

Analytics: Creating self-service dashboards to better understand our student body, allow units direct access to data to inform decisions in real time.

Student Payments: Developed communications to guide students, units, and service providers to prevent unnecessary delays in scholarship and employment pay.

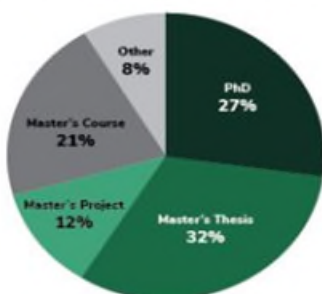
We further commit to:

Enhanced Reporting: For example, calculate time-to-completion and attrition in more sophisticated ways and correlate with other demographic information.

Support Student-Centered Program Management: Improving systems that track individual student progress to support program management (e.g. automated notification of overdue advisory committee meetings).

10,055 applications
4,405 students enrolled
1,041 credentials awarded

14% of Usask students are grad students



GOAL 2: SUPPORT STRATEGIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT & RECRUITMENT


Progress:

Centralized Strategic Recruitment: All recruitment positions moved from CGPS to Student Recruitment (TLSE) creating a collaborative approach. Central recruitment officers trained on graduate programs.

Increased domestic efforts: Leveraged new meeting platforms to hold virtual open houses for local students and have presence at regional recruitment events.

Competitive Tuition Strategy: Fall 2022 removal of international differential fees for PhD students.

Strategic Enrolment Management: Inaugural [Enrolment Report 2021/22](#) with demographics, patterns of student enrolment and key student outcomes. Intended to generate questions and discussion, the report will mature over time with additional metrics.

 **EDI and Admissions:** Introduced the graduate community to evidence-based approaches for holistic admissions (Panel Discussion May 27, 2021)

Recruiting Indigenous Students: Created Indigenous Graduate Student Initiatives Coordinator position (term role) to support retention and recruitment.

Reframed Priorities:

The goals around recruitment need to evolve. While many graduate programs are selectors, meaning their application pressure far exceeds capacity, others are recruiters, needing recruitment activity to position their program in competitive national and global contexts. Equity deserving groups need attention and international recruitment efforts should support diversity across programs and limit exposure by relying on a handful of regions. It is essential that we elevate

our effort to recruit Indigenous students to be responsive to the TRC calls to action and ohpahotân.

We further commit to:

Ensure Centralized Recruitment is Strategic: Examples:

i) liaise between colleges/schools and Student Recruitment ensuring needs are understood; ii) closely monitoring return on investment (conversion of activities to quality applications; iii) enhance promotional materials.

Promote EDI in admissions practices:

- Review admission requirements and policies.
- Educate units in best practices for admissions and for scholarships.
- Institute unconscious bias training for faculty serving on academic affairs/admissions committees.

Increase Indigenous Recruitment and Retention: reach parity with the provincial demographics and broaden interest in a range of disciplines.



7% of students self-declare as Indigenous

Indigenous PhD enrolment **increased by 38%***
Master's thesis enrolment **increased by 23%.***

GOALS 3 & 4 Reframed: COMMIT TO IMPROVED AND EQUITABLE SYSTEMS, POLICIES, PROCESSES AND SERVICE STANDARDS

The CGPS will complete a comprehensive review of its policies and processes to ensure they are responsive to

ASPIRATION CREATING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS that take graduate students beyond traditional degree outcomes and support them as scholars to be contributors to the world prepared for a variety of career paths. CGPS will look for ways to challenge the status quo through program *innovation*, elevating equity, decolonization, and inclusion, and work toward lasting *impact* on our community and future graduates.

EDI and that they enhance the ability of academic units to deliver the best possible programming. Administrative load will be reviewed to identify creative and innovative approaches to improve the experience of CGPS stakeholders.

Progress:

Increasing flexibility overall was much accelerated by what was necessary to operate in the pandemic.

Highlights include:

i) Improvements to Admissions: digital transcripts now preferred; piloting delegating approval for domestic admissions to select departments.


ii) Student life-cycle process improvements: – expanding JIRA system to manage transactional processes, reducing forms, using electronic signoff, streamlined thesis submission to ETD, defenses by Zoom.

Policy Change to advisory and examination committee composition and thesis/dissertation defence processes lessens demands on faculty time and empower departments for master's defenses.

We further commit to:

Service Focus: Through fostering a mindset of continuous improvement in our staff, we will adopt best practices and continue to streamline processes to provide outstanding service while containing costs.

Transparent service standards: Publish targets for turn-around of standard items and report on performance.

 **A comprehensive EDI review:** Guided by the university's EDI policy (2020), perform a systematic review of CGPS academic policies, procedures, and practices.

GOAL 5: MOTIVATE AND SUPPORT PROGRAM INNOVATION

Progress:

Increased Student Supports for onboarding, career exploration and professional development:

i) The Grad Hub: a website of specially curated information that allows students to onboard themselves at their own pace and connect to services, activities, and central offerings. ii) Pilot Aurora platform: empowering PhDs to transition to meaningful careers through a unique external professional development training platform launched in partnership with Career Services.

Making change toward reconciliation: The 4 Seasons of Reconciliation short course (via GMCTL) designed specifically for graduate students - promotes anti-racism education through an Indigenous Peoples and Canadians lens.

Removing barriers to incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in the doctoral process such as our first oral dissertation success “[kihteyhayak pihkswestamawnan: Wisdom Keepers Will Speak for Us](#)” by trailblazer Chris Scribe (Assistant Professor FNU), supervised by Dawn Wallin.

Elevating Interdisciplinary Studies: Guided by external reviewer recommendations, a Director of Interdisciplinary Programming is now embedded within the CGPS Dean’s Leadership Team. Increased resources to grow the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program and facilitating promoting activities of the program to a wide audience.



Graduate program review shines a light on the success of CGPS’ Interdisciplinary graduate program.

We further commit to:

Encouraging program innovations: i) Foster distinguished learners through articulating degree-level learning outcomes. ii) Ensure efficient approval process

for certificates and diplomas and support microcredential development that are stackable, transferable, and applicable.

Expanding Professional Skills: i) Introduce individual development plan (IDP) tools for all graduate students. ii) create modular offerings in collaboration, leadership, innovation & entrepreneurship, project management, professional communication, EDI, and intercultural competencies for stand-alone use or to embed the training within program curriculum.

Increasing efforts to decolonize graduate education through anti-racism training for staff and faculty and structural changes that enable and validate Indigenous ways of knowing as scholarly output.

GOAL 6: EXPAND INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



37% of students are international

The top three countries by student citizenship are **China** (16%), **Iran** (15%), and **India** (10%).

Progress:

Rejuvenating development of international sponsorship agreements with new agreements for China Scholarship Council students and sponsored students from Egypt.

Removing barriers for dual, cotutelle and visiting research students. For example, adopted the common cotutelle tuition model with to maintain registration while only charging students tuition in one institution at a time.

We further commit to:

Increasing opportunities for inbound and outbound mobility.

GOAL 7: WORK TOWARD MULTI-YEAR PLANNING

Progress:

Instituting multi-year commitments for graduate funding: The [reimagine funding review](#) proposal includes three-year rolling commitments.

Multi-year tuition plan. A multi-year tuition plan was developed that leverages stable government funding to 2024.

We further commit to:

Implementing changes to the student funding streams: to allow academic units to make firm multi-year commitments at the point of admission.

Working with the senior administration to continue multi-year tuition planning.



Reimagine Funding Initiative goal is to simplify allocation methods and provide units better flexibility.

GOAL 8: ENSURE PROGRAM QUALITY

Progress:

Quality Assurance Process Change: In 2019, academic program review was moved under the auspices of the Provost's Office with a new format for the review.

ASPIRATION to embolden and activate USask's internal and external graduate community. CGPS will bolster its value proposition, share its **story**, and look for ways to connect USask's graduate **community** in a community of practice.

Program Reviews to date –
2021: AgBio, Interdisciplinary Studies (virtual site visits)
2022: Education

We further commit to:

Following through on APR recommendations by supporting programs to make the changes.

Establishing cogent degree-level learning outcomes and supporting all programs to articulate aligned program learning outcomes in a way that validates program design and gives students the vocabulary to describe what they know and can do when they have finished supporting their transition to a range of careers.

 **Leading in inclusive excellence.**

GOAL 9: SUPPORT OF POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

Progress:

Elevated Postdoctoral Fellow profile through website revisions that increased [SPS membership](#), and refined communication channels.

Resources for Fellowship Success: Developed and provided fellowship application training and support.


Career Development: Tools and activities created that provide postdocs opportunities to acquire skills important for all career paths (e.g., Individual Development, free access to Aurora Career Planning platform, 3MP communication competition)

REFRAMED GOAL 10: REVISE THE CGPS GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Participatory academic governance is the foundation of a strong, collegial, and nimble graduate community and the governance structures need to evolve to meet the needs of our programs, faculty, and students. The existence of two senior governing structures of CGPS in the Graduate Faculty Council and the Graduate and Postdoctoral Council with overlapping mandates and authorities creates confusion. The approval pathways for new and revised programs are deemed slow and at times counterproductive. A new set of college bylaws will feature a revised governance structure designed with a commitment to transparency and streamlined processes.

Progress:

Improved Program Approvals: removed unnecessary steps for approval; co-located course and program approvals in one committee.

Governance Renewal: Undertook phased approach to refresh and recalibrate the [college governance](#) that streamlined the number of committees, updated responsibilities and mandated an EDI lens be brought to each committee's work. 

We further commit to:

College bylaws - completion and implementation.

Membership Update – review and update policies and processes to better manage the membership and ensure services and supports are adequate.

Indigenization and decolonization - guided by Ohpahotân and supported by OVPIE, develop our college level Indigenous Strategy to provide access, mentorship, changes to structures, and training for faculty and staff.

REFRAMED GOAL 11: EMPOWER COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS BY DEVELOPING ROLE CLARITY BUILD A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CGPS AND TEACHING COLLEGES/SCHOOLS/DEPARTMENTS

CGPS and the teaching colleges/schools share responsibility for graduate programs and graduate students. The colleges and schools manage and resource programs while CGPS provides leadership by setting institution-wide policy and standards, stewards millions of dollars in graduate funding from internal and external sources and performs many registrarial functions with respect to the management of graduate programs. CGPS also provides service to solving complex multi-party problems and conflicts. Success for this joint responsibility requires continued collaboration and strong bidirectional communication. CGPS is committed to supporting units in their work with graduate students through communicating, training, and providing resource materials.

Progress:

Improved Internal Communications: regularized internal communications and created various channels to enhance stakeholder engagement and college communication efforts (e.g. operational bulletins, newsletters, stakeholder forums).

Increased Resources for Training Staff: Developed training tools and opportunities to connect with others who support graduate programming and students (e.g. graduate administrator handbook, graduate chair guide recruiter onboarding).

Projects with stakeholder engagement:

- [Reimagine Graduate Funding](#)
- [Advisory committee and defence](#) working group
- [EDI policy review](#) (in progress).
- Professional skills/990 project

We further commit to:

Sustained training for graduate administrators and graduate chairs.

Bringing ideas to the community: Catalyze change and best practices by inviting external experts to engage our community.

Rebalancing of decision-making authorities: Ensuring decisions are made at the right level (department, school/college or CGPS) by subject-matter experts and one-over-one approval required only as deemed necessary for risk to student or institution.

GOAL 12: TELL THE COLLEGE STORY

Formalized Communications Strategy: In 2019 the college adopted its first internal formal communication strategy and developed its Be Bold, Be Ambitious campaign. Key objectives of the strategy were to: communicate the college's mission and vision and create *brand awareness*; deepen, strengthen, and rediscover relationships in *celebration* of graduate student and postdoctoral scholarly success; Position the CGPS as a *leader of graduate education*.

Progress:

Recent **telling our story events** features have included: Rebranding the Distinguished Graduate Mentor award (2021); Showcasing our emerging talent by featuring current graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to Saskatchewan's Minister of Education (2021); "A toast to graduating doctoral students" synchronous celebration (June 2021); the [75th Anniversary magazine and website](#).

We further commit to:

Outstanding communications: through continued development on the college communication strategy with a heavy focus on stakeholder relationships and service ethos.

GOAL 13: CULTIVATE LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALUMNI

The experiences of our alumni while they were students and during their working careers can inform the evolution of our academic programs. Alumni will be invited to share their experiences to help our programs

remain relevant and strong. Alumni will also be instrumental in helping us to anticipate changes, opportunities, and challenges within our global environment, ensuring that our programs and institution are responsive to the expectations of the next generation of scholars.

We further commit to

Learning about and from our Alumni: Conducting a PhD/PDF Alumni Study, ongoing events that celebrate students and postdoctoral fellows' achievements beyond their tenure at USask, and finding ways to connect current students with Alumni.

Please send questions or feedback on this report to debby.burshtyn@usask.ca.