The HUB: A Graduate Student Orientation Platform Proposal

Prepared by Andrew Hartman, MEd & Karen Lawson, PhD CE
Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan

For Lori Lisitza, Executive Assistant
College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, University of Saskatchewan

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"The HUB, 'plug-in' to your graduate student experience."

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College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Room 116 Thorvaldson Building
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C9

P: 306-966-5751
grad.studies@usask.ca
www. cgps.usask.ca

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1.0 Overview of CGPS Orientation

1.1 Description of the Issue

Universities serve multiple functions within society. Universities provide economic opportunities, address local social issues, conduct innovative research, and produce a highly skilled workforce for the economy. Such institutions are large systems with divergent moving pieces that incoming students are required to navigate throughout their educational journey. The mass amount of information students encounter when first engaging with their institution can be overwhelming, impacting their understanding and interpretation of how universities function as well as their responsibilities and requirements. Compared to their undergraduate peers, graduate students have additional challenges in the form of the layers, of information, policies, and procedures that they are required to interact with and navigate (Vickio & Tack 1989). In order for students to be successful in their studies they need to become knowledgeable around how to successfully navigate their university or college. A common practice to support students with obtaining this institutional knowledge is through orientation activities (Poock, 2004a). These activities are conducted to support students in transitioning to the intuition with the overall objective of retaining the students until degree competition (Poock, 2004a).

1.2 University of Saskatchewan & College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

The University of Saskatchewan (USask) is a top Canadian U15 research institution (U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities, 2020, June 30). USask enrolls over 18,300 undergraduate students and 4,150 graduate students from across the country and world (University of Saskatchewan, 2020, June 30). Students who choose USask have the opportunity to enroll in over 80 undergraduate and 93 graduate programs in over 150 different fields of study (University of Saskatchewan, 2020, May 1). While undergraduate programming functions are overseen by the Teaching, Learning, and Student Experience portfolio, graduate degrees require additional administrative duties (e.g., dissertations, funding). To support these additional supportive tasks and increase capacity in other colleges, the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) provides support to current and prospective students at all levels of graduate and postdoctoral studies.

The CGPS' main function is to provide guidance and administrative oversight for graduate programming, which includes supporting faculty and staff within all USask programs. Thus, CGPS plays a critical role in the success of our graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. Outlined below are examples of CGPS core functions:

- Support graduate students throughout the GS Life Cycle (e.g., recruitment, applications, admissions, orientations, convocations)
- Manage university-wide scholarships and awards from provincial, national, and international agencies and donors.
- Oversee the development of new program proposals, program revisions, course approvals and all matters related to graduate and post-doctoral student academic affairs
- Collaborate with other units and colleges to ensure USask's high quality graduate programming and leading graduate program reviews
- Form critical external partnerships (e.g., government, funding agencies, universities) to continually improve graduate and post-doctoral students' experience to support their success

CGPS Graduate Student Orientation

Currently, at the University of Saskatchewan there are four separate categories of orientation events that occur: 1) Undergraduate Student Orientation coordinated by the Teaching, Learning, and Student Experience Unit (TLSE); 2) College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) Graduate and Postdoctoral Student Orientation; 3) College & department specific orientation activities; and lastly, 4) orientation activities from other administrative units (e.g., residence, International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), Graduate Student Association (GSA)). CGPS is the only unit positioned to provide a more general orientation for graduate students.

The CGPS graduate student orientation has been offered for several years and has shown growth in attendance over the years. Prior to 2016 the graduate student participation rate was estimated to be around 30-40 students; however, the number nearly doubled that year to 85 graduate students. The following years the event shifted portfolios to the Executive Assistant (EA) of the CGPS Dean. Since then the event has shown considerable growth every year (Table 1).

Table 1: CGPS Orientation

2016	2017	2018	2019
85	195	373	467

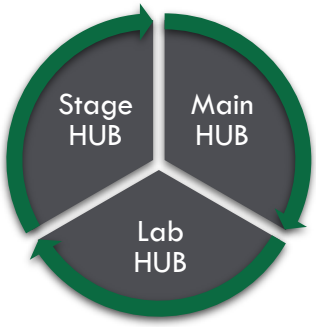
As noted in Table 1, nearly 500 hundred students participated in the 2019 CGPS orientation, which is only half of the overall graduate student intake at USask. The number of orientation participants is likely to grow as the institution works towards building the graduate student enrollment number. The limited resources (e.g., staff oversight, funding) and a large number of student attendees makes executing a positive first impression for students quite difficult during orientation. The new CGPS Hub orientation platform will serve to overcome the resource and staff capacity limitations, while also facilitating a more inclusive and accessible orientation experience. For example, staff have noted that, while gathering all students in one location in September provides a unique orientation atmosphere, there it may limit the delivery of information to attendees and it fails to deliver accommodate students who are admitted to other terms, as well as part-time and off-campus graduate students.

Orientation Staffing and Oversight

Prior to this year, the CGPS orientation was planned, coordinated, and executed by the CGPS Executive Assistant. On the day of orientation, the EA is the only University staff member managing the event. Although the EA is provided two to three volunteers from the partnering TSLE office, the arrival of these volunteers is not consistent from year to year. The current orientation structure follows a 3-hour lecture format where administrative units present 'relevant information'. This information however is formatted to reflect an institutional, and not student, perspective. Cumulatively, the strain on the orientation coordinator combined with the low information recall and negative evaluation feedback relayed by previous attendees has led to the proposal for a new orientation structure.

The Proposed Project

Figure 1: CGPS Orientation Components



The purpose of the current project is to design a graduate student orientation *for* students *by* students, with the ultimate goal of elevating the student experience throughout the entirety of their studies. Achieving this goal requires first engaging with students and listening to their experiences, ideas, and needs with respect to orientation. Specifically, the CGPS Orientation will encompass three orientation components: 1) ***Main HUB*** **-** a digital graduate student information source that supports students in system navigation; 2) **Lab HUB -** an onboarding platform (i.e., Canvas) that develops students' foundational academic skills (e.g., navigating online course, time management); and lastly, 3) ***Stage Hub*** **-** helps foster a USask identity, a sense of belonging, and new connections with staff, faculty, and students. The term ***onboarding*** is purposefully being used to draw attention to the need for graduate students to receive proper training on organizational policies and procedures they are expected to understand and navigate throughout their program of studies.

To maximize project success, an orientation working group was created by the project lead. The working group was comprised of CGPS staff, a graduate student advocate (i.e., Graduate Student Association), a graduate student representative, CGPS orientation partners (i.e., TLSE representative, recruitment representation, Gwenna Moss Centre representative), and lastly, the Executive Assistant to the Dean, who is the lead of this project. The working group was created in January 2020 and met regularly up until data collection. The three-fold objectives of the Orientation Working Group were to:

(1) Examine additional or alternative ways to engage new and re-entering graduate students in a timely way
(2) Provide relevant and timely information
(3) Elevate the CGPS Orientation offering through providing value to graduate students

Alignment with Strategic Plan

To ensure this project aligns with the University of Saskatchewan's growth and development, strategic plans from relevant administrative units were reviewed. A cross-map between the project's goals and functions and USask's strategic commitments is listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Cross-mapping of USask Strategic Goals and HUB Orientation Elements

Strategic Plan	Commitment/Pillar	Goal
USask Plan (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.a)	1. Courageous Curiosity	*Seek Solutions*. Foster a problem-solving, entrepreneurial ethic among students, faculty, and staff, harnessing opportunities to apply our research, scholarly, and artistic efforts to community and global priorities.
	2. Boundless Collaboration	*Align Structures*. Ensure that academic, administrative, and physical infrastructure enable collaborative opportunities for all students, faculty, and staff.
CGPS Plan (University of Saskatchewan, 2018)	2 Support strategic enrollment management & retention	... Strategies will be responsive to the student recruitment needs of college/school partners, and these will take into account, among other details, capacity and opportunities for growth, student retention, time in program and targeted scholarship funds.
	3 Commit to systems, policies, & processes	... Internal and unit administrative load will be reviewed to identify creative and innovative approaches that will improve the experience of CGPS stakeholders.
	6. Expand international opportunities	A comprehensive approach to incoming students will include not only recruitment, but also redefined support during admissions through to program completion.
	12. Tell the college story	... We will develop a CGPS communication plan that affirms who we are, identifies the supports we provide and allows us to congratulate our stakeholders and help to celebrate their successes.
TLSE Plan (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.b)	1. Enhancing and aligning systems, structures and processes require us to focus on three goals	*Leverage technologies*. We will optimize existing and new technologies to enhance our academic and student experiences...We will support data-informed decisions and contribute to a culture of accountability and transparency.
		Streamline processes. We will enhance service by simplifying processes and reducing bureaucracy. We will develop inclusive processes that recognize the whole person and the diversity of our student needs....
		Optimize resources. We will seek sustainable, flexible solutions that enhance the quality of our programs and services.
	3. "Walking the talk" of reconciliation	*Commit to reconciliation*... We will ensure that all people are invited in to be active and essential participants in reconciliation. Our graduates will leave our institution with an understanding of Indigenous worldviews.
	4. Co-creating a climate of inclusion, empowerment and support	*Enhance retention/completion*... We will develop, implement and strengthen flexible, learner-focused structures and programs that support students throughout the learning and development cycle...
Technology Plan (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.c)	1. Enhance student experience	Leverage technology to support the university's strategic enrolment goals while improving systems that enable the various teaching, learning and student experiences that our students need.
		Develop holistic student lifecycle engagement systems that consider prearrival experiences, student connections, support through the entire journey, and wellness and diversity.
		Leverage technologies that enable equitable and positive student learning experience regardless of where and when learning occurs
	2. Empower creative learning	Leverage technology to support the learning of all students through learning-centered programs and services focused on future skills, outcome/competency-based assessment, flexible credentialing and experiential learning.
		Provide access to an evolving ecosystem of technologies that enable innovative teaching and learning, including robotics, simulation, virtual reality and active learning.
International Plan (University of Saskatchewan, nd.d)	1. Internationalizing learning experience	Optimize participation in co-curricular activities that are inclusive and foster intercultural understanding
	2. Diversifying our university community	Support the well-being and success of our international students.

2.0 Overview of Evaluation

2.1 Evaluation Purpose, Type, and Theoretical Approach

The purpose of the proposed project is to revitalize the graduate student orientation by designing a theoretically sound, student-focused orientation program that responds to graduate student needs. To achieve this purpose, we proposed applying a formative needs assessment. A formative evaluation helps collect information that can be utilized towards a program's improvement (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2019). The needs evaluation component aimed to assess various aspects of a social issue and identify the various needs for an intervention (Rossi et al., 2019). In addition, the needs assessment provided information relevant to the orientation program design regarding what supports or services are needed, and the best way such supports can be delivered (Rossi et al., 2019). Our needs assessment prioritized student voices to identify the needed supports and the desired way these supports should be delivered to incoming graduate students. Based on the findings and in collaboration with the project lead, a graduate orientation platform was designed, which is further outlined in Section 4 of this document.

Student perspectives, ideas, and identified needs were used as the framework to develop the orientation activities. Students were provided the opportunity to speak about their current perceptions of the CGPS orientation, new graduate student needs, preferred orientation structure (e.g., in-person, online), and the best ways in which information should be communicated (e.g., presentations, videos, infographics, etc.). Additionally, the information provided by students was augmented with staff and faculty perceptions, as well as with best practices as outlined in the literature.

This project was guided by two theoretical approaches to evaluation; utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008) and participatory evaluation (King et al., 2007). Evaluation theory helps guide the evaluation and directs what evaluation activities should be conducted and the type of results that will be produced. A utilization-focused evaluation approach works to gather the most valuable data for the evaluation's intended *users'* (i.e., CGPS orientation planning stakeholders) intended *use* (i.e., designing a graduate student orientation) (Patton, 2008). In order to achieve this objective, the evaluator is required to collaborate with the primary users of the evaluation in all evaluation decisions (Patton, 2008). The second theoretical approach guiding this study, participatory evaluation, involves collaborating with program stakeholders throughout the evaluation in order to maximize the comprehensiveness and applicability of the evaluation findings. Maximizing the utility of evaluation findings is attained by collaborating with stakeholders throughout the project as a means to increase the relevance and develop stakeholder ownership towards the findings (King et al., 2007). Thus, a utilization focused evaluation ensures that we are collecting data that will be useful, whereas the participatory evaluation helps ensure the results will be used. In alignment with both of these approaches, an evaluation steering committee, which included the previously established working-group, was struck to facilitate collaboration and oversee the evaluation. This group was active throughout all aspects of the evaluation design (e.g., purpose, objectives, methods) and also provided feedback on the evaluation questions and focus group protocol to ensure we were collecting data that would be of most use to the working group. All working group members were invited to participate as notetakers in any focus group. The data collection adaptations outlined in Appendix C and D were approved by the coordinator of the working group, ensuring the changes were still in alignment with the evaluation design and purpose.

2.2 Evaluation Objectives

The goals of the evaluation were to:

(1) Identify USask graduate students' orientation needs in a comprehensive document grounded in the perspective of stakeholders (e.g., students, staff faculty) and academic literature

(2) Describe the theory of change underlying the CGPS revitalized orientation and that visually demonstrate the theorized casual linkages between program activities and desired outcomes through a program logic model

(3) Propose a CGPS graduate student orientation program specifically designed to meet the needs of USask graduate students

2.3 Evaluation Deliverables

The key deliverables for this evaluation project are:

- Final Evaluation Report outlining USask graduate student needs
- Formative proposal for a CGPS graduate student orientation design (i.e., Main HUB, Lab Lab, Stage HUB)
- Program logic model and articulated theory of change

2.4 Program Logic Model

In preparation for this evaluation we developed a program logic model (PLM) to document the Hub's theory of change (ToC). All interventions have an underlying, ToC, that explains why the specific activities are expected to lead to the desired changes or outcomes (Rossi et al., 2019). Connected to a ToC is a PLM, which is simply a visual representation of the intervention that demonstrates the different causal chains. Please refer to Appendix A for the PLM depicting the new orientation model.

2.5 Evaluation Activities

The evaluation matrix below (Table 3) outlines the evaluation questions, indicators, and data collection methods that guided the evaluation. These questions were created in collaboration with the CGPS working group to gather information regarding student needs. In addition, the group assisted in developing the focus group protocol for students and other stakeholders (Appendix B). The data collection tools were created later (i.e., rapid interviews, online survey) and adapted based on these original questions (Appendix C, D). Finally, this project was reviewed by the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Ethics Board (Beh-REB) and received an exemption certificate due to the evaluation focus of the research activity.

Data Collection

Literature Review. A literature review was conducted to identify the best practices and evidence-based programming with respect to graduate student retention and orientation design and delivery. Literature was collected through both USask's online library database and Google Scholar. Literature that focused on other aspects of the graduate student life cycle (e.g., completion and departure from their program) was not reviewed.

Table 3: Evaluation Matrix

	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	LR	FG/KII	RI	SV
Need	Is the current orientation design relevant to incoming students' needs?	Graduate student needs identified in the literature	X			
		Student accounts of unmet needs		X	X	
	What are the current orientation needs amongst current University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students?	Student perceptions of orientation needs		X	X	
Design & Delivery	What is the CGPS Orientation Theory of Change?	Empirical evidence in the literature	X			
		Staff perceptions		X		
	What are the current best practices of orientation structures and designs?	Best practices outlined in the literature	X			
		Stakeholder perceptions of other orientations		X		X
	What are the best orientation structures for the current context (e.g., in-person, online, webinar)	Best practices outlined in the literature	X			
		Stakeholder perceptions of desired structure		X	X	X
	What are the best orientation activities to deliver the information (e.g., presentations, videos, podcasts)	Best practices outlined in the literature	X			
		Stakeholder perceptions of desired structure		X	X	X
	What is the most important information to be communicated through orientation activities (e.g., supports & services, program requirements, policies)	Best practices outlined in the literature	X			
		Stakeholder perceptions of crucial student information		X	X	X
	In what ways can the CGPS be improved?	Stakeholders perceptions of way to improve		X	X	X
	What are the current barriers that prevent students from participating?	Stakeholder perceptions of barriers to orientation		X	X	X

Table Legend: Literature review (LR), Focus groups (FG), Key informant interviews (KII), Rapid interviews (RI), Surveys (SV)

Focus groups and key informant interviews. Focus groups provide an efficient way of collecting qualitive data that could identify commonly identified needs amongst graduate students. Ten focus groups were scheduled throughout the month of May and early June. Focus groups were arranged by specific demographic categories (e.g., international, domestic, Indigenous, STEM, various disciplines, staff & faculty). Focus group participants were recruited through email, PAWS bulletins, and social media posts, that prompted interested individuals to register for a WebEx focus group through Eventbrite. Registered participants received reminder emails up until the focus group start. While there was initial uptake in registration, three sperate focus groups ran with only a single participant in each group. As such, these were switched to a semi-structured key informant interview format. All three focus group participants agreed to continue with individual interview.

Interviews were held over WebEx, each lasting roughly 60-90 minutes that were audio recorded for later reference if needed. Interviews started with reviewing basic WebEx functions, group norms, and the consent form. Participants were provided the opportunity to ask any questions at any time, and the interviewer commenced by asking the questions outlined the data collection guide (Appendix B). A member of the research working group took detailed notes of participant responses during the interview, forming the body of data available for analyses. At the end of every interview participants were thanked and reminded of the university and community supports available to them. After each interview the researcher reviewed the interview notes and recorded reflections based on their initial perceptions. Both the interview notes and the interview reflections were uploaded to NVivo for later analysis. After all focus groups and interviews were completed, the project lead and researcher noticed a strong trend in the data which lead to modifications in the interview guide to focus more specifically on the types of content and desired ways of delivery (Appendix C) during the rapid interviews.

Rapid interviews. In response to the low focus group uptake and our perceptions of time required being a potential barrier, rapid interviews (30-40 minutes) were developed for graduate students. The rapid interviews had a stronger response rate with 15 participants expressing interest, and nine participants completing an interview. Participant recruitment and interview facilitation occurred on the same platforms as the previous focus groups/key informant interviews. To increase accessibility and flexibility, interview times were offered within a seven-day period from 10:00 AM to 9:00 PM. In to increase timing flexibility, rapid interviews included only the participant and the researcher, who took handwritten notes in addition to audio recording. Of the nine participants, one participated only through the chat function due to technological difficulties. The 'chat' narrative was transferred to a document and uploaded to NVivo for analysis. Another participant also requested a telephone interview due to technological barriers, which prevented audio recording from taking place.

Qualitative survey. In response to the low focus group uptake amongst staff, faculty, and orientation partners, a qualitative questionnaire was designed to increase accessibility and participation. In collaboration with the project lead, we adapted the focus group guide to create a short seven item confidential questionnaire (Appendix D) that could be complete at anytime throughout a two-week period. Optional demographic questions (e.g., level of engagement with orientation planning & execution; stakeholder role) were also collected to ensure diverse perspectives were captured. Participants were recruited through email listservs and were directed to the online questionnaire which was hosted on the Survey Monkey platform. Fifteen participants completed the questionnaire, including representatives from graduate program chairs and highly engaged college orientation staff. The narrative data was download from SurveyMonkey as an Excel file and uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis. Once data collection was complete, a final review of the data was conducted to locate potential errors or missing data. Following this, the data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) approach to thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is useful in identifying themes or patterns that occur throughout a data set. The identified themes were separated into two theme domains: CGPS Orientation and GS Identified Needs. Each theme domain was compromised of additional dominant and subordinate themes, as outlined in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 The data and identified themes were also used to develop the CGPS orientation's ToC (Appendix A).

3.0 RESULTS

The projects results are separated by three sections. The first section reviews the graduate student literature focussing on conceptualizing graduate programs, retention issues, orientation structures and approaches. Following this, the results of the thematic analysis are outlined in Sections 3.2 and 3.3. Section 4.0 outlines the proposed orientation program design that was developed from these findings.

3.1 Literature Review

Graduate Degrees

Before engaging with graduate student orientation models, we first need to define graduate degrees: "graduate degrees are advanced scholarly levels of education where students are "expected to acquire and apply advanced analytical and interpretive skills, as well understanding and/or producing research." (Boland, 2012, p.5). Graduate programs can be separated into three categories: terminal programs; non-terminal programs; and professional programs (Boland 2012). A terminal program is program that requires completion of a masters and PhD separately, while non-terminal degrees involve a masters level program feeding directly into the PhD. Lastly, professional programs require students to acquire and apply specialized skills. These professional programs will often also fulfill education qualifications for various certified professions, such as, physiotherapists, principals, or counsellors.

Historically graduate students could, for the most part, be characterized as full-time white cis-male students from affluent backgrounds (Gardner, 2009; Offerman, 2011). Over the years the demographics of graduate students have begun to shift so that institutions are beginning to notice more diversity (e.g., studying part time, Black Indigenous people of colour [BIPOC]) (Polson, 2003). This demographic has shifted so much that the relevance and usage of the term, traditional students, has been argued as outdated (Offerman, 2001). The heterogenous graduate student populations have reinforced the notion that diverse students have diverse needs which require diverse responses (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998; Poison 1999). As such these demographic changes lead those delivering student services to rethink the structures and delivery of those services (Polson, 2003).

Graduate Student Life Cycle and Student Development Theory

Although there is greater focus towards investigation of undergraduate research and development (e.g., Chickering, 1969; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; McEwen, 2003), such findings are not directly applicable to graduate student programming. Graduate students have unique activities compared to undergraduate students, including teaching, research, and administrative duties (Stewart, 1995; Vickio & Tack 1989). While note directly applicable to graduate students, Greene (2013) commented that undergraduate student transitional research is a potential starting point for areas that graduate student findings are lacking.

Development theories usually classify the graduate student cycle: entry; candidacy/engagement; and completion/exit (Feldman, 1976; Garner, 2009; Steward 1995). Institutions should consider these cycle points in the design and delivery of student services. Specifically, orientation programs should focus on the development needs students experience in their entry phase. For example, this a time when students adjust to the consistent evaluation that graduate students encounter from both their peers and programs (Stewart, 1995). This is also the

time when heightened social comparison with other students that can lead to the onset of shame and imposter syndromes. As such, support student socialization at this stage is critical.

> "Development at any level occurs as a result of two conditions: challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). According to Sanford, when individuals are presented with a challenging situation or experience that has not previously been encountered, a new response emerges, thereby resulting in development. If too many new situations emerge without the appropriate support to mitigate these challenges, however, the individual may actually digress in his or her development. Therefore, it is the optimum balance of challenge and support that underlies development." (Gardner 2009, p. 7)

Therefore, to best support graduate student development during this phase, we need to provide the appropriate supports that prepare them for the challenges they can expect to face in their graduate program (Gardner, 2009). Entering graduate students at any level are guaranteed to face new challenges, and if universities fail to properly prepare them for these new challenges, they are going to less likely be retained.

Graduate Student Retention and Orientation

Graduate student retention is a major issue for institutions. One study noted that only slightly over 50% of doctoral students will successfully complete their graduate program (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). Student attrition, especially at the doctoral level, is extremely costly for institutions. Faculty invest in building relationships with and mentoring students, in addition to the lost recruitment time, materials, events, and funding (Garner, 2009). Doctoral students' early departure can also have drastic impacts on the life path of students (Lovitts, 2001). While these studies focused specifically around doctoral research, the literature around graduate students still remain quite low (Gardner, 2007). Gardner (2007) identified five main focus areas within the research pertaining to doctoral students (completion and attrition; socialization; dissertation research; advising roles; and relationships) and two areas of intersection (gender and race, and disciplinary differences).

When students are transitioning into their graduate programs, they face new challenges such as unique admission and registration processes, the need to engage with their coursework at new levels, and create a balanced life within graduate school (Gardner, 2009). In addition, students are likely to face three types of barriers throughout their program: situational (life circumstances); dispositional (internal states and self-perceptions); institutional (systemic barriers posed by policies and procedures (Cross, 1981). Institutions should provide the proper support for students to be able to overcome each of these barriers in relation to their studies.

When students are first engaging with their graduate program it is common for students to experience stress and anxiety (Poock & Love, 2000). Peer mentors have been reported being helpful in alleviating initial anxiety, increasing the understanding of departmental dynamics (Cusworth, 2001), and providing psychological and emotional support (Erickson & Travick-Jackson, 2006). Social supports and social networks (including faculty, colleagues, peers, and family) are important protective factors student transition and retention (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

The shift to remote course offerings due to CoVid-19 for the fall of 2019 highlights special issues related to learning and student retention. Students who are unprepared for online learning and/or are new to engaging with classmates online, can experience increased feelings of isolation (Cho et al., 2010; McInnerney & Roberts 2004) which can impact their inability to achieve course objectives (forum post) (Cho & Jonassen 2009). Additionally, Lee and Choi (2011)

identified that attrition from online courses are connected to student skills (e.g., time management), psychological attributes (e.g., self-efficacy), and their online interactions with other students. Self-efficacy is a particularly strong indicator of online academic success (Artino 2008; Cho and Jonassen 2009). Specifically, skills in interacting with other students online appears to be fundamental to success (Cho and Jonassen 2009).

The literature highlights several important actions institutions can take to support student retention during the entry phase:

1) Provide adequate supports to enable students to overcome situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers they may face
2) Support students in developing their social support networks to reduce anxiety and stress
3) Teach students how to properly use the institutions' online systems
4) Expend additional efforts to support the socialization process within online programming
5) Provide students with the proper resources to build their skills and self-efficacy

Orientation activities can play a critical role in addressing these factors, and it should be not surprising that orientation activities are linked to graduate student retention (Buchanan, 1989; Issac, 1993; Phillips, Daubman, & Wilmoth, 1986; Poock, 2004a; Washburn, 2002).

Orientations Approaches, Models, and Activities

Orientation can be described as "any efforts...to assist incoming students making the transition to graduate education" (Poock, 2004a, p. 475). Vlisides and Eddy (1993) identified that orientation programs can vary widely in scope and focus. At the core, however, orientations should be designed to prepare students for the expectations of them and to make them aware of the appropriates resources to achieve the said expectations (Poock, 2004b). Those who coordinate orientation efforts should ensure the program's goals and objective are properly outlined (Pollock 2004b).

When it comes to orientation, graduate students have been described as underserved (Pontius & Harper, 2006). As such, institutions need to improve their approaches to preparing entering graduate students to help reduce student anxiety and foster success within their graduate program (Vickio & Tack, 1989). In order for coordinators to develop successful orientation initiatives that achieve their events objectives, they need to understand, and respond to, their graduate student demographics (Barker, Felstehausen, Couch, & Henry, 1997; Poock, 2002). Specifically, focussed attention should be given to the unique needs of underrepresented groups, including first generation and international students, and racial minorities (Polson, 2004a). We also recommend addressing the unique needs of Indigenous students, women in STEM, and 2SLGBTQ graduate students. It is important to note that responding to diverse student group needs should be the responsibility of the entire institution (Poison, 1993).

Orientations are typically held at the beginning of the academic year, one to five days before the term start (Poock, 2004a). Intuitively, it is recommended that orientations should be held at times that are convenient for different student group types (Polson, 2003). For example, often distance students or those who work full-time are often excluded from these activities due to external commitments or barriers.

Various forms of orientation activities have been reported including self-directed website, speaker series, half-day seminars, concurrent workshops, information fairs, plenary session; peer mentor programs, summer orientations, graduate feast, cohort approach, and week-long events to

name a few (Britto & Rush, 2013; Fischer and Zigmond, 1998; Forney & Davis, 2002; Poock, 2004a; Taub & McEwen, 1998). Pollock (2004b) encourages institutions to follow best common practices (those employed by the majority of institutions) and specifically recommends that orientations of at least half a day in length be scheduled before classes formally. Pollock noted that enforcing orientation as a mandatory activity was common in a 1/3 of institutions that participated. Further, within the orientation activities, students should be allowed to meet and interact with peers and should be able to choose between workshops or group sessions depending on their needs.

Online orientation models often focus on helping the students with navigating the institutions learning management system, fixing technical issues, facilitating online engagement with peers (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005), and building social relationships (Dare, Zapata, & Thomas, 2005). Cho (2012) noted that orientations often focus heavily on administrative and technological content, and exclude the student perspective. Cho highlighted six types of self-efficacy regarding online learning success:, "(a) completing online course, (b) interacting with classmates for academic purpose, (c) interacting with the instructor for academic purpose, (d) self-regulating online learning, (e) handling tools in a CMS such as Blackboard, and (f) socially interacting with other classmates." (p. 1056-1057). Proper orientations can help reduce the repetitive technological questions instructors receives (MacVay, 2000), allowing instructors and students to focus more on course content.

Orientation strategies have been successful in supporting student retention (Poock, 2004a; Washburn, 2002). Orientation aids students in their socialization (Knott & Daher, 1978; Poock, 2004a) and in developing relationships within their department (Ponitus & Harper, 2006) and throughout the institution (Ponitus & Harper, 2006). Orientation activities help student to adjust to their new graduate program (Boyle & Boice, 1998 by preparing them for upcoming academic challenges and reducing uncertainties and anxieties (Vickio & Tack, 1989). In sum, well designed orientations can ease the often difficult transition to graduate studies by providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate these novel and social transitions (Miller, Miles, &

Based on the literature, graduate student orientations should cover five main areas of content: academic information, departmental and institutional culture, socialization, functional information, and lastly, research and teaching assistant preparation. Entering masters students, specifically, need to be prepared for the differences between an undergraduate versus a graduate student (Vickio & Tack, 1989), including information such as performance expectations, departmental norms and culture, program requirements and regulations, key departmental members (including support staff), academic advising, and campus climate (Cusworth, 2001; Poison, 1999; Pontius & Harper, 2006; Poock, 2004a; Vickio & Tack, 1989; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

One of the most important functions of orientation is supporting graduate students with socially integrating into their campus department (Cusworth, 200, Polson, 1999, 2003; Rosenblatt & Christensen, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). Orientations should strive to support students in making connections to the department and the overall institution, and should facilitate peer connections by providing opportunities for non-competitive engagement between students (Poison, 1999). It is also important to remember that distance students, and other students unable to attend an in-person orientation, still require support in their socialization to the institution (Polson, 2003).

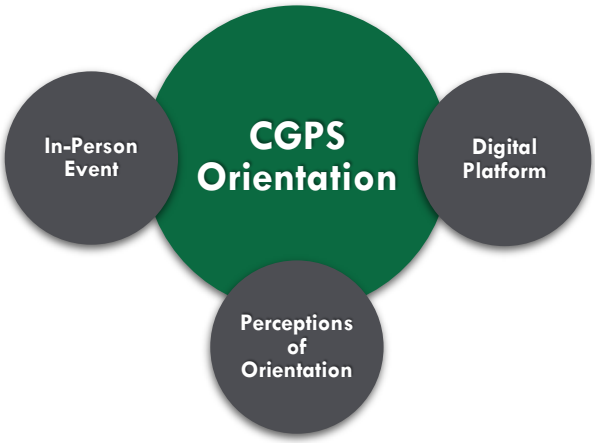
All topics within the orientation should be relevant to student needs, and the most commonly identified content areas include information related to bookstores, computer facilities, child and

elder care, parking, financial aid, libraries, all support services, and campus security (Baker, 1992; Cusworth ; 2001; Kelley, 1999; Poock, 2004a). Students also require information outlining expectations in all domains of a graduate students' experiences (e.g., academics, research assistance, teaching assistance), and available resources for meeting these expectations such as available workshops which will help them to develop their abilities (Gustav & Powell, 1979; Poock 2004a). Institutions should also provide additional information and support to students who will be assuming research and/or teaching assistantship roles. Lastly, other practices mentioned included sharing resources that synthesized information (e.g., registration instructions, deadlines, check lists, handbooks, recreation information, FAQ) (Cusworth, 2001; Poison 1999; Poock, 2004a; Taub and McEwen, 1998).

3.2 CGPS Orientation Themes

During the interviews with students, participants discussed their experiences with and perceptions of the previous CGPS orientation. Overall, participants had moderate or ambivalent reactions towards orientation. Students were able to recall limited positive and negative reactions towards the event. Common reflections including the perception that the orientation did not meet their needs, feeling unprepared for their program, and the desire for more opportunity to build connections. The analysis of the interview data identified three main themes: perceptions of orientation; in-person events; and lastly, the digital platform (Figure 2). Each major theme had subsequent sub themes, which are outlined throughout the following sections.

Figure 2: CGPS Orientation Main Themes



Perceptions of orientation

Timing. Students reported that limiting orientation to early September creates a lag effect for students who begin in other terms. Specifically, those students who enter the institution in January and May must wait to receive essential orientation information. One student that began during the summer term attributed their limited academic success (e.g., falling behind in course requirements and not completing supervisory tasks) to their limited knowledge and the lack of accessible information; issues that could have been addressed during orientation. Students who entered the university either the winter or summer terms reported not receiving any transitional support from the university and also perceived orientation as irrelevant by the following September, highlighting the knowledge gap for these students. Staff also mentioned that the current orientation offering is typically held before students arrive on campus and that orientation should be offered at the start of every term for graduate students.

Awareness. All stakeholder groups remarked on the low awareness of CGPS orientation. Some participants who were aware of the orientation offering reported being deterred from attending by supervisors and fellow students. Others indicated that lack of clarity regarding objectives and/or eligible orientation participants led them to believe they were not the intended recipient of the services. These barriers or deterrents to participation limit the number of students benefitting from orientation.

Communication. Interview participants recommended that CGPS communicate orientation information to incoming students through multiple methods (e.g., emails, Facebook, Twitter, websites) to engage the most students. Several students were unable to recall ever receiving information about orientation, and indicated that, had they received such information, they would have attended. Participants specifically recommended that CGPS provide orientation information before students arrive, that they correspond with students monthly, that they create a specific brand, and that they include personal touches within the email to help students identify the email's relevant to them.

Information. Previous CGPS orientation attendees noted that it was informative. However, they commonly noted that they struggled with being overwhelmed by all the information provided and that this created issues around recalling the information at a later date. Linked to this, one administrator indicated that faculty become annoyed with student questions that faculty assume were covered in the CGPS Orientation. Other staff recalled that students often request more specific information about program requirements. One international student requested that Canadian and Indigenous peoples' history be briefly explained at orientation, and for land acknowledgements to avoid strictly scripts and possess more 'feeling'.

Socialization. Participants believed that the main purpose of orientation should be to welcome students and help establish a sense of belonging, community, and a USask identity. However, there were conflicting perceptions about CGPS orientation in that those who did not attend believed it was primarily a social function, while those who attended reported the focus was on relaying (an overwhelming amount of) information. Attendees specifically noted that the event was too formal, and lacked a more informal, social atmosphere that would be conducive to socializing with other students and staff.

In-Person Event

Issues towards in-person events. Large in-person events can pose barriers to participation, especially for graduate students with children, full-time jobs, or who study off campus. The big crowds can also act as a barrier to asking questions or making meaningful connections with others. When upper-year students are involved as mentors for entering students during orientation, it is important that the mentors be properly vetted and informed. One participant relayed their orientation experience in which the upper-year mentors appeared to be those who were struggling, therefore in the program longer, triggering fear in the new students. Participants also recommended that orientation facilitators should be clear regarding the purpose of specific orientation activities so that attendees can properly process the information (e.g., indicate that the purpose of having faculty introduce their research areas can serve the purpose of exposing students to potential supervisors).

Building social network. One identified benefit of an in-person event was the ability to build the students' social network. By hosting graduate students in the same room, the event allows students to foster initial relationships with other students from their program, or college. It was also perceived as being a good way for entering graduate student to meet key staff. Interview participants indicated that an in-person event was the preferred mode for building connections and engaging with others, but that is was not the preferred method for receiving information.

Ideas for in-person orientation. Participants had several ideas about future in-person orientation activities. Most frequently, they had suggestions regarding activities related to developing social connections with others, including breakout discussions, faculty speed dating, a family welcome, end of day social, incoming graduate student monthly campus meet-ups, and a peer mentor program that pairs incoming students with a mentor before they arrive. While not

specifically noted within the interviews, campus meet-ups for diverse population may help those who feel isolated in their programs to better build connections (e.g., POC, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ).

Digital Platform

Affirming attitudes towards platform. The overall response towards incorporating an online platform was positive. Staff and faculty reported that moving to an online platform would likely be beneficial to students as it could be continually accessible, engaging, and would centralize the important information. The respondents saw particular benefits to an online platform in the current context of COVID-19. However, one participant suggested a hybrid approach would be most effective where the online platform provides information and the in-person event allows for further interpersonal connections to form.

Functions of platform. Participants identified several means by which the platform can aid student transitions. First and foremost, the learning outcomes and benefits of the orientation platform should be clearly communicated to students in order to improve their motivation to access the platform. Once accessed, the platform should house all critical information necessary to orient students to USask in one location, thus reducing the amount of irrelevant searching students have to conduct. This informational platform would also be beneficial for current senior students who may need to access specific information. Participants suggested that entering students should be provided with a pre-arrival checklist identifying important steps they should take and highlighting the salient information.

Students also requested the platform differentiate information according to graduate degree type and level of study (e.g., thesis versus course-based programs, or a masters and PhD levels of study). Additionally, the platform should be able to act as a connection between physical and digital spaces by directing student to other relevant sources of online information (department pages, links to social services and locations, policies and procedures) and actual relevant physical spaces, once the institution reopens post-COVID-19.

Benefits of the platform. Throughout the data collection participants noted several benefits the platform provides over the previous orientation model. The first benefit is the platform's increased accessibility and improved reach. Second, the platform provides a flexible delivery model in that information can be accessed anywhere and easily updated, ensuring that the most current information is available to students. A digital platform serves an especially important function or providing the relevant information for off campus students or those with commitments that would prevent attending an in-person orientation.

Additionally, the platform can help improve the way in which students process and comprehend information. Allowing students to consume information at their own pace and convenience can enhance attention to the information, which facilitates both information comprehension and retention. The online function also provides students access to the information immediately after admittance, allowing the possibility for students to begin their program informed. Other benefits less commonly mentioned were the cost savings associated with an online app, environmental benefits associated with less printed paper, and easy data collection.

Barriers to platform. Student, faculty, and staff participants mentioned very few perceived barriers to the online platform. All participants noted that creating awareness and connecting students to the platform would be crucial to its success. Because navigating through PAWS to the platform was perceived to be a potential barrier, participants recommended that the platform be accessible outside of PAWS. Lastly, there were concerns of the platform interfering with current

initiatives of individual units. It is worth noting that all identified barriers were also relevant to the previous orientation design

Conveying platform information. Participants commonly requested that the online information be delivered in diverse ways, including written format, fact sheets, videos (2-5 minutes each), comparison charts, and other visuals. Students specifically requested that the platform allow for videos to be easily sorted into categories. Participant noted that it is vital that the information is accessible to all students, and for this reason an online platform was the preferred mode of delivery over an app, as access to a smartphone could be a barrier for some students.

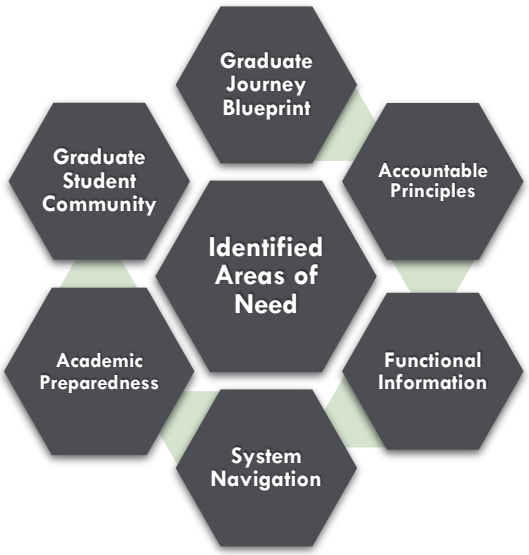
Regardless of the method chosen to communicate the information, all participant groups identified the necessity for information to be student focused and targeting student needs. Specifically, they recommended that information should be provided in a positive tone, included videos should be desired by students, and the design should be dynamic and engaging. Overall, they recommended that the platform should be "easy to use, find, and provides value". Incorporating these elements can enhance the utility of the platform to students and can serve to increase attention and retention of information.

Participant expressed concern that the online platform could limit the social aspects associated with in-person orientation formats, but they believed that opportunities to engage with other students through the platform were possible. Specifically, they suggested such options as hosting live group orientation chats, utilizing forums to allow interactions between students, and providing opportunities to ask questions. Several participants also commented on the opportunity for faculty/staff to participate in online discussions and make early connections with entering students. Other suggestions included incorporating a 'progress bar' indicating progress through the sections, ensuring continual and early access to the information, and using the institution's new Learning Management System, Canvas.

3.3 Identified Areas of Need

The next domain explored in the data were graduate students' *Identified Areas of Need*. The themes within this domain related towards the type of information that students reported as essential for incoming graduated students. This domain was comprised of six main themes that elaborated on specific areas of need: Graduate Journey Blueprint, Student Accounability Principles, Functional Information, System Navigation, Academic Preparedness, and Graduate Student Community (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Identified Orientation Area of Needs



Graduate Journey Blueprint

Transitioning from previous degree. All participants noted the need to support students as they transition from their previous degree program to their new program of studies. Students moving from an undergraduate degree to a graduate degree, or from a masters to a PhD program, require information regarding the differences in performance expectations. For example, one faculty member highlighted the importance of preparing graduate students for handling the unknown.

Process of a graduate degree. Gradate students reported the benefits of having a general map or outline their graduate degree structure, requirements, and process upon entry. They indicated that receiving this general overview at the start of the program allows students to plan ahead throughout their program. This program overview should ideally detail all salient aspects of the degree program, highlight the performance expectations, discuss access to funding sources, and provide a schedule of tasks, timelines, and other important degree milestones

Information for course-based students. Often institutions focus more on supporting students pursing a thesis, with less support being given to students who complete their program with a capstone project. Students noted that there needs to be adequate guidance given to course-based students to enable them to plan ahead and prepare for the specific requirements of their program of studies. These students also reported that they often experience confusion on who to approach for information or guidance, as they often have faculty or staff advisors instead of supervisors. Clarity regarding the duties and functions of these roles, and other administrative personal (e.g., graduate chair) would be helpful for all graduate students.

Thesis guide. Students spoke of the need for more specific information about the thesis itself, and the concept of a thesis blueprint emerged. The thesis blueprint would be a comprehensive document outlining all information relating to completing a thesis or dissertation including: advisory committee structures (roles, responsibilities, and considerations); demystifying the comprehensive exam and thesis process; thesis structure; general approaches to research; selecting a research area; logistics (e.g., proposal defence, thesis defense); and a hypothetical timeline students can use as a guide when planning.

Students also identified that incoming graduate students require should be given specific information on the student-supervisor relationship. Specific topics included information on how to select and engage with your supervisors, supervisor roles and responsibilities, and important elements to discuss with your supervisor (e.g., deadline, deliverable, project milestones). CGPS currently provides a student-supervisor agreement template to encourage these discussions between students and supervisors, however participants reported negative experiences while reviewing this agreement with their supervisor. One participant specifically communicated their supervisor was dismissive of various elements in the agreement that were important to the student (e.g., funding).

Student Accountability

Student responsibilities. Students identified the need for better communication regarding their roles, duties, and responsibilities. For example, one participant noted, "graduate students need to know what they have to do". This theme relates to all graduate student activities such as thesis/dissertation research or projects, and teaching, research, and graduate student assistantships. Several students reported being confused regarding responsibilities related to their research or projects. One student noted that they had assumed several responsibilities that should have fell on their supervisor. Clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of students versus faculty/research supervisors is required to avoid confusion and delays in progress. In addition, faculty and staff also noted the importance of providing enough information so that students are able to understand their responsibility and accountability.

Student rights. Corresponding the above theme pertaining to student responsibility and accountability, participants also spoke of the importance of communicating information related to student rights. Many participants reported concerns related to not knowing their rights and consequently experiencing fear of losing their stipends or funding. Participants mentioned that it is extremely important for students to know their rights in order to distinguish between appropriate

and inappropriate requests from their supervisor. Additionally, students who work as teaching or research assistants should be made aware of their employee rights and the graduate student union (i.e., Public Service Alliance of Canada). Several students identified issues with understanding their rights and noted available student advocates should be clearly identified from the beginning.

One participant who had experience as both a staff member and a graduate student described witnessing supervisors place undue stress on graduate students as a direct result of the supervisors' poor planning. This participant described systemic barriers where students are advised to go through the proper process of first discussing the issue with the supervisor, which often places the student in an uncomfortable or harmful position. The participant noted the irony in how "*you are told to come to CGPS at orientation but stonewalled when going CGPS. There is no personal protection, students have to put their neck out*" (Rapid Interview Participant). As a result, this participant recommended that graduate students be provided with open support and an option to document complaints on paper so that they can take action either at the time or at a later date.

Student expectations. Staff, faculty, and students all identified the need to clearly communicate to graduate student the expectations placed on them. Staff and faculty reported that struggling with expectations was a prime issue for graduate students, and students themselves specifically indicated issues with adjusting to new grading standards. As previously discussed, the expectations of graduate students are not usually clearly communicated to them upon entry, or upon transitioning to PhD. Specific recommendations included providing clear information to students regarding degree level expectations, grading systems at USask, target grades, and recommended actions after a course failure.

System Navigation

University governance (Institutional, College, School, Department, CGPS). Students noted difficulties in understanding the various institutional structures and how they interact. The differences between a college, school, and department, and how they function within the university system, were noted as complex issues to comprehend. Students also indicated the need to better understand the relationship between their programs/colleges and CGPS. Students also reported wanting clear information specifically about CGPS policies, processes, branches, units, and student supports and services.

System navigation support. Students identified difficulties in navigating and prioritizing the different institutional policies. Some student noted discrepancies between various levels of policy/procedures, notably between those at the department level and those liad out by CGPS. As well students expressed that the differing policies between programs/departments causes confusion, and detailed information about the existence of, reasoning for, differential policies would prevent both confusion and misguided attempts to enact the practices of peers in different departments. Finally, students identified struggles in identifying critical staff that could provide support, and how to navigate the different department and university processes.

Accessing support. Support related information, including who offers supports, what specific services they provide, when is this service available, and how students access the support (e.g., drop-in, call, appointment), should be clearly communicated. A visual mapping outlining who to go to for specific situations was noted as something that would be helpful. Students also suggested that a resource helping them to identify when they should access a support and an example of a script of how to ask for support (e.g., booking a counsellor) should be developed. One specific support that was noted is the need for teaching assistants to have a clear understanding of who

they should approach if they are experiencing difficulties with the course instructor. A final recommendation was that students should identify their departmental support persons, and if possible, develop an academic support team.

Navigating physical space. Student should receive guidance around how to navigate around the campus and the city. The campus covers a large physical area and providing a map to students that contains not only outdoor spaces but also indoor spaces like tunnels, would be very helpful. This map should also identify key academic support units, like CGPS, and contain enough information to help students locate their different classrooms. Information about the city itself, including how to use public transportation, and where to access groceries would also facilitate the ability of students to navigate their environment.

System navigation issues. Students commented that when they first arrived at the institution, they found it quite difficult to navigate all the new information. This difficulty was compounded by the misinformation they felt receiving from peers and staff. Sometimes students were unaware of being misinformed at the time and only realized later. Other times students were very aware of receiving conflicting messages and experienced being directed in a circle by different departments. Students also reported struggling to connect very generic or abstract information from different sources to their unique situations and programs.

International students have unique experiences and challenges compared to their domestic peers. International students must navigate complex governmental procedures and websites in order to obtain study permits and to gain information regarding the policies governing their approved work. ISSAC was noted as being a strong support in this area. International students also suggested that an outline of the steps involved with moving from another country (e.g., customs and immigration issues, what do to upon arrival in Saskatoon, etc.) would be a very helpful resource and enable them to more effectively plan. Finally, some students (international and domestic) may be coming from cultural backgrounds mental health issues are strongly stigmatized, and specific and sensitive information related to accessing mental health supports may help to overcome the stigma and enhance student wellbeing.

Functional Information

Structured support. Students indicated they needed more structured support and information to help them to carry out the initial tasks required of them upon arrival at the institution. Graduate students, especially those from other institutions, specifically reported confusion about very practical issues such as how to order textbooks, obtain a student card, or locate classrooms. Many indicated that they did not know who to contact about booking lab spaces and/or research equipment needed to conduct their thesis research.

Program requirements and course registration. Student participants identified the need to receive detailed information about their specific program (e.g., program overview, program requirements) and also support in interpreting these requirements. For example, one student recalled not understanding the purpose of non-credit courses. Building on this concept, students also relayed the need for information and support related to registration issues, meeting deadlines, and other pragmatic course considerations such as scheduling in advance to plan for courses that are not offered every year. On a very pragmatic note, staff noted the need to remind students that they have to register in all three terms.

Supports and services. Support and Services were highly mentioned by all participant groups and could ultimately be grouped into two groups, academic supports and non-academic supports.

Academic supports. Academic supports identified to be communicated were the library, Student Learning Services), Gwenna Moss Centre, Language Centre, campus resources (e.g., scholarship, housing, work, health insurance), Wellness Centre, ISAAC, GSA, Access & Equity Services, academic advisors, available advocates, and college and department specific supports and services. Students should be provided with clear information about the roles of each of these support entities so that they know who they can access for what specific issues. Specifically students recommended that the wide range of supports provided by the librarians be outline to incoming students.

Non-academic supports. Students also requested more information pertaining to the non-academic supports available to support their wellness. Information regarding the specific services available is needed, but more importantly, students want more information on who can access services, and the process to follow in accessing services. International students may require specific information about health care options and associated costs. Lastly, students also require information of the numerous community available to them (e.g., Saskatoon Foodbank, OUTSaskatoon, Open Door Society).

Academic Preparedness

New terminology. Students reported struggling with developing the graduate student vocabulary when entering their programs. They noted that specific terms are effortlessly used by departments, faculty, and staff but that they are never introduced or explained to students. For example, terms such as conceptual frameworks, cognate courses, thesis committee, external examiner, oral exams, theoretical frameworks, graduate chairs, thesis proposal, comprehensive exams, and thesis defense were all terms that were noted as being initially confusing to students. Defining these terms to students early in their programs would avoid confusion and ease the transition to graduate studies.

Graduate student success strategies. Orientation is an ideal time to provide entering students with 'strategies for success' that they can apply from the start. For example, providing graduate students with tips and strategies for obtaining good grades, developing a writing practice, and using reference managers will facilitate their success. As noted by one staff member, there's a change in expectation between an undergraduate degree (regurgitating information) and graduate degree (preparing to explore the unknown), and the strategies that worked for them in their undergraduate degree may no longer serve them well.

Course processes. For students to truly be prepared for success they need to understand the ways in which University of Saskatchewan's classes and library systems operate. Participants specifically suggested that entering students receive training on how to successfully complete online courses given the shift to remote learning due to CoVid-19. They also identified the need to ensure students know about course reserves, how to find class articles, and how to submit online assignments. Finally, many students identified the need to properly inform new students how to make maximal use of grading rubrics to improve their performance as not all students will have previous experiences with these.

Skill building. The need to proactively train students in various skills related to success was a very strong theme across participants. The most commonly identified skills are discussed below and are schematically represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Identified skill needs

Many students noted the need to build skills pertaining to student wellness. Graduate students require information about mental health issues commonly encountered during graduate studies. This information should be provided from a student perspective and it should help build their mental health vocabulary (e.g., shame, imposter syndrome), normalize mental health issues, and connect students with relevant resources. Stress management strategies should be taught to students to help them with managing the emotional toll of graduate studies, and students should receive information on how to stay safe on campus and in Saskatoon.

Students also frequently discussed the need to build skills that would proactively support students in completing their degrees including: project management, time management, writing support, and engaging in critical conversations. Basic project management training would help students obtain the basic skills to manage their thesis and schedule activities appropriately by planning ahead (gaining ethics approval, obtaining access to equipment and lab resources) thus avoiding delays. Time management skills enable students to properly plan for graduate course loads and equip students to manage procrastination and time pressures. Writing support can help students to improve their writing and should incorporate providing examples of the expected level of writing performance for their degree. Additionally, building writing skills should also encompass training students on how to avoid plagiarism and how to use the proper citation style for their discipline. Lastly, developing critical conversational skills will equip students with strategies to engage in successful communications with important others (supervisors, committee members) throughout their programs and can help avoid or manage conflict.

Additional areas in which skill building was identified as needed involved technology and teaching and research assistantship preparation. With respect to technology, students require proper support in order to successfully master the use of PAWS, learning management systems, library searches, and email (including setup). These technological skills are also often central to student success in TA and RA roles, but these students also require additional unique skill supports, such as those that will help them to develop teaching skills prior to embarking on a teaching experience.

Graduate Student Community

Ways to get involved. The university should provide multiple ways for students to get involved and should stress the importance of socialization in student's success early on. Participants noted that there should be formal ways to introduce them to USask student life, and that this is related to enjoying their graduate student experience. Specifically, they suggested that incoming students should receive information about existing social groups/clubs and recreational activities (e.g., PAC). One student highlighted the 3-minute thesis competition as a means to engage students, build connections across the institution, and normalize their experiences USask's. The co-

curricular record should be introduced and explained to students, with an emphasis on its function, purpose, and how to use it.

Building social networks and support systems. Students identified that the university should support students in building their social networks and support systems at the start. Two strategies to accomplish this objective are by inter-program connections and advertising student gathering spaces. The importance of these networks was highlighted as facilitators for students to tap into each others knowledge.

Cultural information. Incoming graduate students travel from across the country and the world to pursue a graduate degree at the University of Saskatchewan. As such it is important to introduce entering graduate students to relevant cultural information. Of particular note within this theme was the need for more information on the history of Indigenous peoples and Canada in general. International students in particular were expressed a lack of knowledge in this area and noted a desire to better understand this history. Students also requested specific information on the difference between Indigenous peoples (e.g., First Nation, Metis, Inuit) and particular terminology that should be used (e.g., reconciliation, Indigenization).

Participants also expressed a need to better understand the social cultural context of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan. Students requested information on enjoyable activities within Saskatoon, outlying communities to explore, and trivia related to Saskatoon and Saskatchewan. One student suggested this could be done in a fun quirky way such as educating students about Saskatchewan winters and colloquialisms by exposing them to term such as toques, mitts, and bunny hugs.

Finally, students wanted inspirational information regarding what makes the University of Saskatchewan a unique and amazing institution (e.g., Canadian Light Source, influential alumni, USask's impact). There was also a desire to hear about USask traditions and history. Specifically, they noted that individual success stories from both current students and alumni could be a way to foster a USask identity

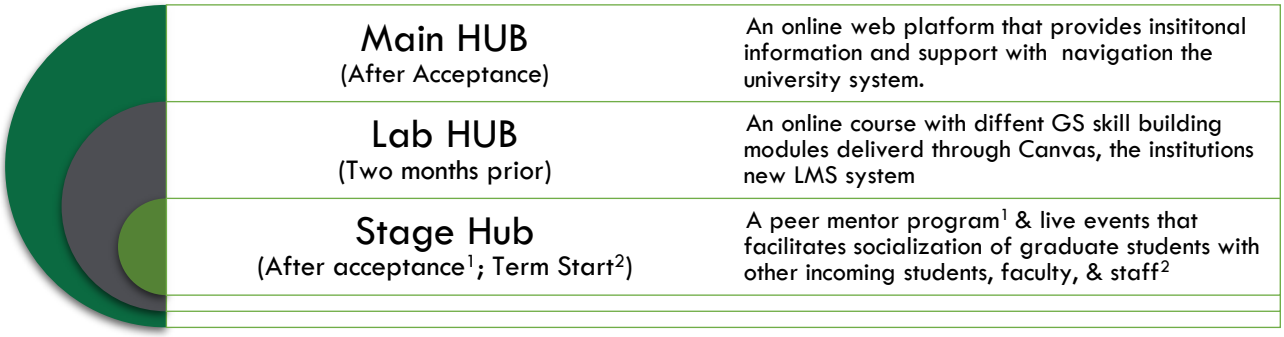
4.0 PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, we propose three CGPS orientation program activities: Main HUB, Lab HUB, and Stage HUB. Each activity fulfills unique orientation needs that provide graduate students a comprehensive orientation experience (Figure 5). A comprehensive approach "…enables students to begin their graduate programs with a clear understanding of the program and faculty expectations" (Mulhern Halasz, & Hapes, 2016, para. 2), allowing incoming students to focus on adapting to their new physical and social environments. We believe the proposed design ensures graduate students receive an appropriate level of support that prepares them for the upcoming challenges of their graduate program (Gardner, 2009).

Using "HUB" as a consistent branding amongst all activities helps create clear and easy identification for incoming students. The HUB brand addresses students' previous struggles with identifying their correct orientation activities (e.g., accidently attending the USask undergraduate programming). Furthermore, each HUB activity promotes the comprehensive HUB experience, addressing lack of awareness as a barrier to participation. For example, the "Main HUB" will explain and provide instruction towards accessing the program's sister components (i.e., Lab HUB, Stage HUB), and vice versa. While the initial setup up of the three platforms will take additional, once all the content has been created the Main HUB and Lab HUB will simply require reviews for outdated (e.g., policy change) or new content (e.g., new student service) at every acceptance cycle.

The HUB will begin launching mid to late August 2020. Main HUB will be the first platform available that provides a continuous centralized location of foundational information through Cascade, USask's web management software. Following, Lab HUB will launch as an online non-credit course through CANVAS, USask's new Learning Management System (LMS). Lab HUB develops students' necessary required onboarding (e.g., TA, RA, Lab Safety) and academic (e.g., course preparedness, copyright, plagiarism) abilities, while also preparing students to succeed in online classes. Lastly, Stage HUB is a live synchronous event that provides opportunities for students to develop new social connections with fellow students, staff, and faculty. For the 2020/21 academic year, the event will take place through WebEx with specific facilitated activities. In future years, we recommend staggering access to the platforms between the point of acceptance and the first day of classes (as seen in Figure 5). A staggered approach allows a flexible and dynamic way to direct students' attention and scaffold the order of information during their pre-transition phase. In addition, this approach may result in students feeling more supported by the institution from admission to arrival.

Figure 5: Hub Program Design



4.1 Main HUB

Main HUB is a centralized location of synthesized critical information for incoming graduate students. The platform communicates information regarding supports and services, preparation, navigating the institution, important contact information, and more (Figure 6). This information is transmitted to students through an online self-directed website (Britto & Rush, 2013) stored as a subdomain underneath the CGPS website. A subdomain exists and functions as stand-alone site, allowing the navigation menu to focus specifically on HUB content, but maintaining an associated URL to the college (e.g., cpgs.usask.ca/HUB). Typically, content is displayed and grouped by an institutional or governance lens (Cho, 2012), as opposed to a student perspective. The proposed platform aims to address this issue and compliments the current university web structure by providing a comprehensive guide, or directory, for graduate students.

The Main HUB organizes information logically corresponding to students' transitional needs, with the purpose of improving students' engagement, consumption, and interpretation. Rather than creating all new content, the platform focuses on reorganizing and transforming the way current information is presented to students. The Main HUB intends to use previously created content as much as possible, but content may be altered for the purposes of clarity, synthesis, and visual communication (e.g., infographic). Departments and units will be consulted to create, approve, identify corrections, and request changes to any content. Each section will display information and connect students back to the original institutional page for further information.

As one of CGPS' role is supporting incoming graduate and post-doctoral students', this responsibility establishes a logical argument for CGPS to oversee and maintain the HUB platforms. Its important to reiterate graduate students have unique needs from undergraduate students (Stewart, 1995), and as such the CGPS oversight ensures consistency in tone, relevancy, accessibility, and upkeep. Furthermore, the specific online location of the subdomain is encouraged to exist underneath the CGPS website.

Figure 6: Main HUB platform framework

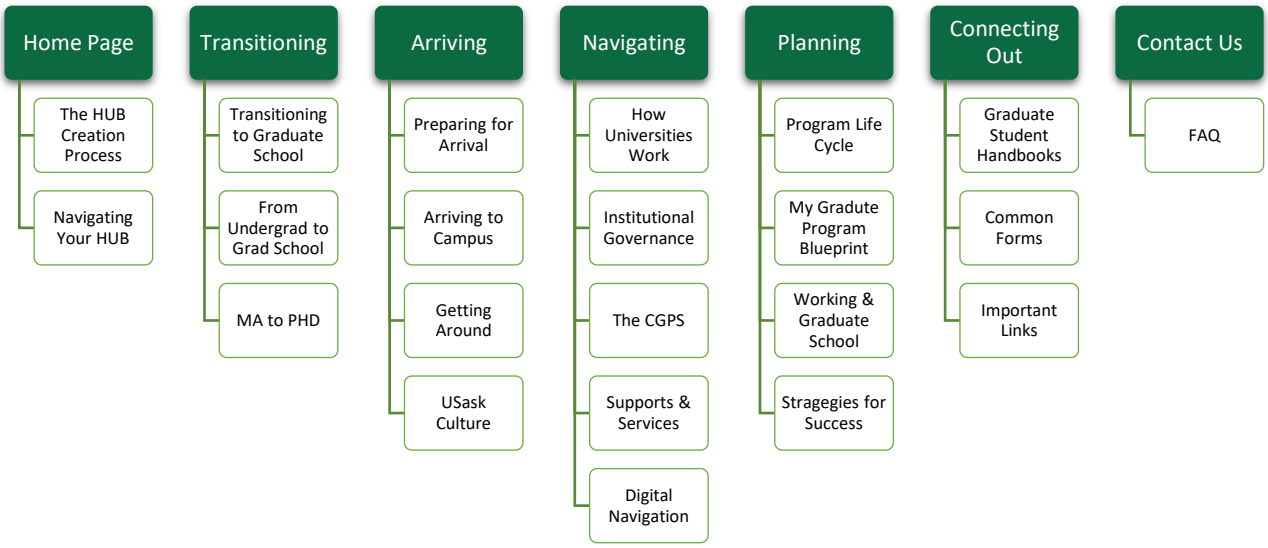
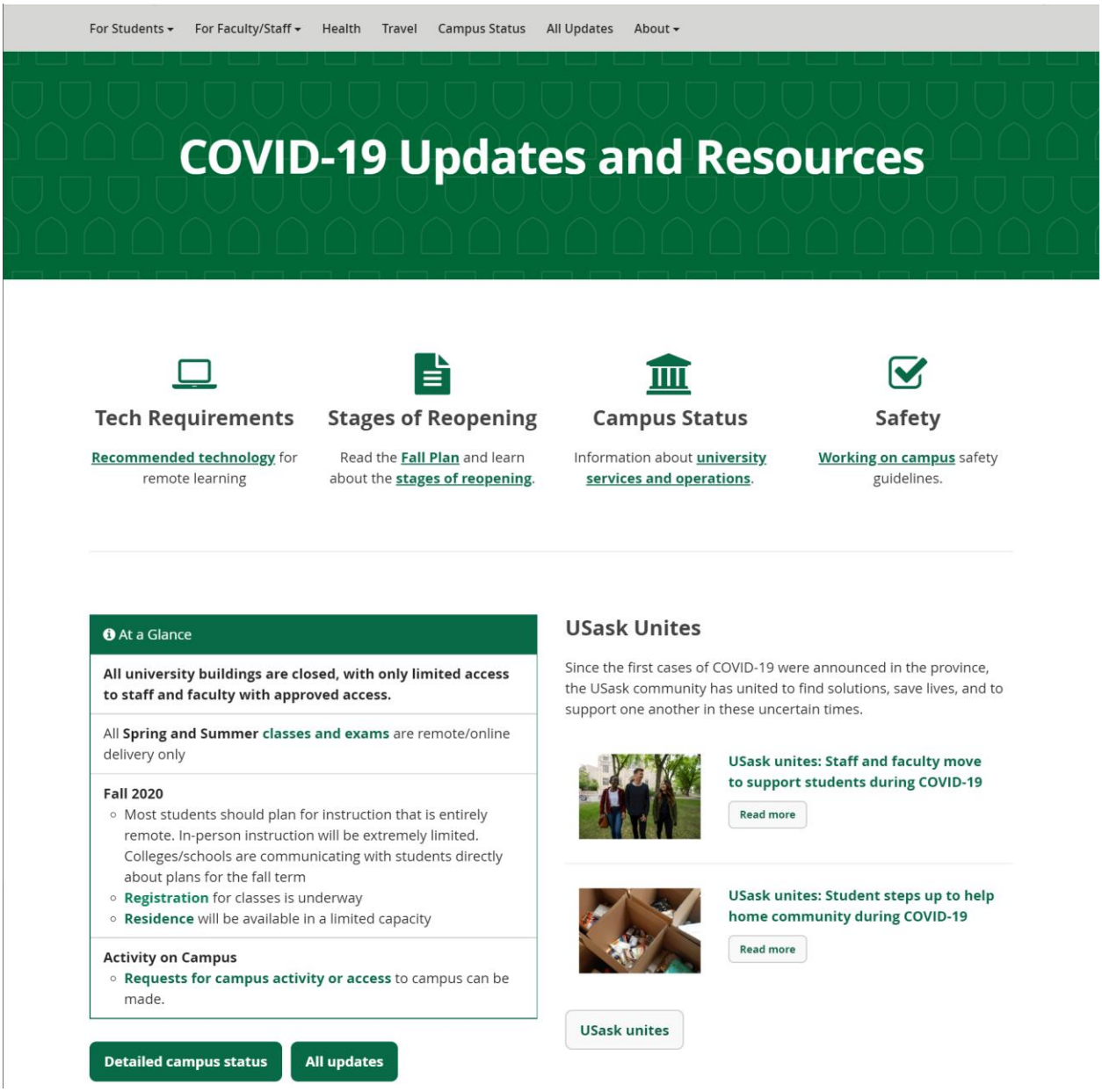


Figure 6 demonstrates an example of the Main HUB's content framework, which is likely to change as information is created and sorted. The top dark green row represents the main navigation bar that houses the sites' sub-pages (e.g., domestic student, thesis blueprint). Content communicated throughout the Main HUB is based on the data collection, literature, previous orientation information, and current information available on the institution's website.

The platform's visual design will display information in a manner mirroring USask's COV-19 website (Figure 7). The page design provides a clean presentation of the information preventing students from feeling overwhelmed. In addition, the home page allows for sharing live information to graduate students, similar to the "At a glance" and "USask Unites" sections in Figure 7. However, the Main HUB will use a unique visual branding that follows USask guidelines, and content will be delivered in forms that best convey the information including videos, graphics, infographics, text, or tables.

Figure 7: The Main HUB example



4.2 The Lab Hub

The Lab HUB is a competency focused (Black, n.d.) platform that develops abilities related to online attrition (Lee & Choi 2011) and overall graduate student success (Artino 2008). Lab HUB

acts as a non-credit, online course delivered through Canvas. The course offers separates modules that each build a specific skill or knowledge set (Figure 8). Graduate students will register in a unique session each (e.g., Lab HUB 2020-09, Lab HUB 2021-01) creating a cohort of incoming graduate students. Distinct courses per-term allows students within the course to develop initial relationships through forum activities with other incoming graduate students and potential classmates.

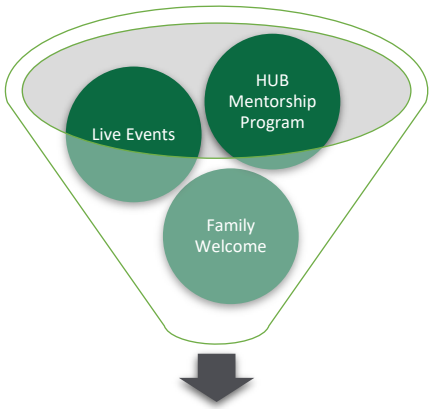
There are three main reasons for using USask's LMS system. First, engaging with orientation materials through Canvas prepares students for success in their online courses. Lab HUB intents to use all Canvas elements (e.g., uploading assignments; forum posts) to ensure students are adequately prepared. Second, the software functions allow for easy module creation, delivery, and evaluation of outcomes. For example, each module requires students to complete pre and post questionnaires, which convey to student both their current competency and information that requires revisiting. Third, the forum capabilities are used to build preliminary connections with incoming students. Specific forum posts amongst subgroups is encouraged to build connections amongst similar group members that may be isolated in their programs (e.g., POC, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ, AES, Women in STEM).

Figure 8: Sample Lab HUB Modules

Modules follow Cho's (2012) structure for online module delivery. Students begin by first selecting the desired module topic that directs students to the module's unique start page. Module starting pages introduce and explain the topics covered, provide examples and outline real-world applications, and convey strategies towards applying materials to their graduate program. Modules durations will extend between 20-40 minutes depending on the required content amount. Modules can be completed in any order, providing a "choose your own adventure" approach, where student are permitted to select modules most relevant to their needs. Content will be delivered through a variety of methods such as, bulleted text, videos, infographics, comparative tables, and student vignettes.

4.3 Stage HUB

Figure 9: Stage HUB components



The final program activity of the CGPS Orientation Model is the program's Stage HUB. Stage HUB aims to support students in developing their social network, an aspect highlighted by both the literature (Knott & Daher, 1978; Poock, 2004a; Taylor & Holley, 2009) and our interview participants. Stage HUB encompasses three activities: 1) HUB Mentorship Program; 2) live events; and 3) family welcome (Figure 9).

HUB mentorship program. The HUB Mentorship Program connects incoming students with graduate student peer mentors. Mentees have the opportunity to access their mentors' institutional knowledge and experiences on a variety of topics. Potential topics include, current experiences, items to pack, campus culture, Main Hub/Lab Hub content, or 'embarrassing' questions incoming student are afraid to ask staff or faculty. Peer mentors can help connect incoming students to the appropriate staff member for different needs, if relevant. Lastly, the mentors can provide emotional and psychological support (Erickson & Travick-Jackson, 2006), hopefully reducing anxiety for entering students.

Peer mentor are required to be currently enrolled as a USask graduate student, have completed both orientation program activities (i.e., Main HUB, Lab Hub), and be positive spokespeople for the institution. We recommend that mentors receive basic training on roles, commitments, expectations, and appropriate ethical behaviour (Almanazar, Hapes, & Rowe, 2018). Mentors are expected to be available to respond weekly to their mentee from the point of matching to the live event where the mentor and mentee have an opportunity to meet. Mentors and mentees are welcome to continue their supportive relationship after the term starts but this is not required. Mentors will also benefit from this relationship as it not only enhances their social network, but also extends their volunteer experiences as acknowledged on their co-curricular record. The HUB Mentorship program should begin in second phase of implementation (May of 2021 as outlined in the Figure 5 timeline).

Live events. Live events allow attendees to meet other students, staff, and faculty which is acritical element in growing social networks and enhancing student retention (Poock, 2004a; Washburn, 2002). Rather than one large orientation gathering held every September, we recommend holding slightly smaller gathering events at the beginning of every term (i.e., September, January, May). Administratively, planning three smaller social network building events per year should be a much more manageable task as compared to the coordination required to offer one large orientation session involving large numbers of speakers, campus partners, and students.

In-person gathering. Both the literature and our interview participants identified the continued need for in-person gatherings as a way to acclimatize to the institution, build connections, and reduce levels of anxiety. As such we recommend that an in-person gathering should occur once it is safe to do so and CoVid-19 restrictions have been lifted. Students requested a semi-formal event that both welcomed them and encompassed balanced social engagement opportunities. Several students requested an inspirational message from leadership that is motivational and relevant for all disciplines (e.g., Social Sciences, Health, Humanities, Fine Arts, STEM), speaks to USask culture and traditions, and helps to build pride for their institutional choice. Participants suggested that

specific information regarding the rationale for land acknowledgement should be relayed in order to educate students new to Treaty territory. Also, in alignment with reconciliation principles, an Elder should be invited to bless and guide the event.

Following these more educational aspects, we recommend engaging in social activities that provide the opportunity for attendees to meet other students and faculty (in both similar and different disciplines and research areas). Overall students noted a preference for a mixture of activities within an informal atmosphere. Specific suggestions regarding possible activities included speed 'dating' with other attendees, an end of day social, or a welcome BBQ.

Virtual gathering. We propose hosting virtual live gatherings at the start of every term in addition to the in-person events. While virtual gathering provide a strategic benefit for CGPS, given the social distancing regulations associated with COVID-19, the main intention is to allow the participation of students with barriers preventing them from attending in-person events (e.g., working full-time, off-campus students, late arrival). We believe that the creative use of technology can create an innovative opportunity for social connection that provides a comparable experience to the in-person gathering.

The event begins with an Elder prayer and campus welcome, similar to the in-person event. Following, the speed dating activities will begin, using breakout rooms in WebEx. Specifically, students will be placed in groups of four to five for roughly 6-9 minutes, allowing them to meet one another. Students will cycle between different preorganized groups that sorts students by a specific theme, such as program, hobby, research area, country, and/or college (information gathered during orientation registration). Faculty and staff may also participate in this activity to develop relationships with graduate students and potentially act as facilitators in a group.

Following a short 'refreshment break', the students will participate in a digital scavenger hunt in which randomly assigned teams of students need to search through the USask website for information to answer a set of questions. These questions, and their associated answers will be both ***informative*** (e.g., allowed time to complete their program), ***entertaining*** (e.g., using Google to identify the distance between Arts & Science and Starbucks), and ***USask identity building*** (e.g., mission statement, famous alumni). The hunt will end by gathering the students in the main room and announcing the winning team. We believe the proposed digital gathering will provide a unique, dynamic experience that will be enjoyed by students, and will serve both an educational and social function.

Family welcome. CGPS should host two online information sessions for families of graduate students: '*What is Graduate School? What Families Need to Know*' and '*Welcome to Saskatoon & Canada: Things You Should Know*'. As families are strong social supports for students (Jairam & Kahl, 2012), informing about graduate school and how they can best provide support will be beneficial for all in the long run. The first session focuses primarily on increasing understanding of the graduate programs/degrees, including the pressures and expectations, and how to provide support. The second session helps family members who are relocating with graduate students to adapt to their new context. Suggested potential topics are local attractions, critical Saskatchewan laws, using public transport, and where to obtain groceries. These events also support these family members s in forming new social connections and potential friendships.

4.4 Proposed Platform Timeline

We propose throughout the next two months the HUB will be continually developed by the student researcher, project lead, and other collaborators. Achievement of the projects' goals relies heavily on partnerships with identified campus experts (e.g., Gwenna Moss Centre and TA

training), consultations with programs about content information, and utilizing previously created materials will aid our efficiency in achieving the various content goals.

In preparation for the platform launch we intend to launch an alpha and beta test during August able to make minor modifications or add additional content as identified (Table 4). The alpha test focuses on collecting internal feedback about content correction, errors, and on areas of improvement from departments, staff, and faculty. Afterwards, previous student participants will be invited to participate in the beta testing. This test acts as a feedback loop to assess accuracy on the interpreted students' needs, and additional gaps. The team is prioritizing information to ensure content essential to student's success when first engaging with the institution is completed by the launch date. Incomplete content (e.g., module, sub webpage) will be launched at a staggered release for students in order of relevance

Table 4: Proposed Timeline

Activities	*July*				*August*			
Weeks	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Attending Working Group Meetings								
Developing Orientation Hub Platform								
Interdepartmental Orientation Coord.								
Platform Alpha Testing								
Platform Beta Testing								
Platform Finalizing								

4.5 Interdepartmental Orientation Coordination

International students consistently reported their perceptions around unnecessary repetition of information amongst the various GS orientation functions. They also commented their perceptions the institution being disorganized and lacked internal communication. We have also already taken preliminary steps to address this issue by deepening our partnerships with ISSAC and the GSA to provide a coordinated orientation experience. By coordinating amongst us these three main graduate student orientations we can remove duplication of information to allow each department to focus on their strengths, also improving efficiency. Our hope is that each orientation can communicate their learning outcomes for students to identify the specific areas that each event will cover.

4.6 Recommendations for Departments & Colleges

Based on the evaluation findings we have listed below graduate orientation recommendation for specific departments and colleges. This list can assist departments in identifying information that is critical for them to communicate to their student. To best support students all departments should clearly orient and articulate students to the following:

- Outline specific department policies and procedures
- Define available department supports and services, use specifics

- Key department personnel, specifically, faculty (including research areas), administrators, and staff, outlining their roles
- Indoctrinate departmental norms, rules, requirements, and
- Prov Instructions for how to locate and interpret deadlines, program/course requirements, and available support in locating funding
- Define program and faculty expectations of graduate students, including performance and conduct (Bloom et al., 2016)
- Build a sense of belonging amongst graduate students (Boyle & Boice, 1998), by providing opportunity to engage with others joining the program, as well as the departments' faculty and staff

5.0 Recommendations & Future Directions

This evaluation identifies a clear need to adapt the previous CGPS orientation model to improve incoming graduate student transitional experiences. The large of amount of information required to be successful when initially navigating one's program can be quite difficult. As well, we identified that the previous graduate student orientation was unsuccessful in meeting graduate students' orientation needs. Many students reported being unaware of the CGPS orientation offering, and being generally unclear regarding CGPS' function on campus. We recommend including information on the CGPS website that informs students about these important issues. Providing a centralized graduate student orientation is important in order to meet the needs of distant students, late arrivals, and for students in lower enrollment programs that lack a formal orientation experience.

Based on the collected data from participants and best practices in the literature, a three-structed orientation program design is recommended: Main HUB, Lab HUB, Stage HUB. The HUB brand helps distinguish the CGPS orientation from welcoming programming efforts directed towards non-graduate students; an element students reported struggling with. We believe the proposed program design will successfully meet the needs of incoming graduate students within the institution's capacity and strategic priorities. The purpose of the HUB is not to impede on other departmental orientations, rather we believe the HUB provides a value add to previous welcoming efforts. The project has also already began coordinating with other departments on orientation efforts, such as, communications, TLSE, and student learning services to ensure proper internal awareness of the project. All participant groups communicated their appreciation for being consulted and having a voice to inform the project.

Important to note that the current project involved a small sample size, comprising of 12 students and 15 staff/faculty perspectives. However, these findings were reinforced by the current literature and provided a strong initial framework to develop the HUB mode. Thus, additional graduate students' needs are likely to continually emerge later on as new students enter the institution. As a result, we recommend conducting future evaluations to ensure continual development. Future evaluations should focus on stakeholder satisfaction, as well as detailed process and initial outcome evaluations. These evaluations should be attentive to the execution of the programming activity and its success. We also recommend that the program coordinator continue to develop partnerships with campus stakeholders to provide further content and updates for the HUB, as well as a more interdepartmental coordinated orientation communication. We specifically recommend that academic departments take an active role in promoting the HUB and providing accurate program content for the HUB, ensuring incoming and current graduates students receive the most up to date information.

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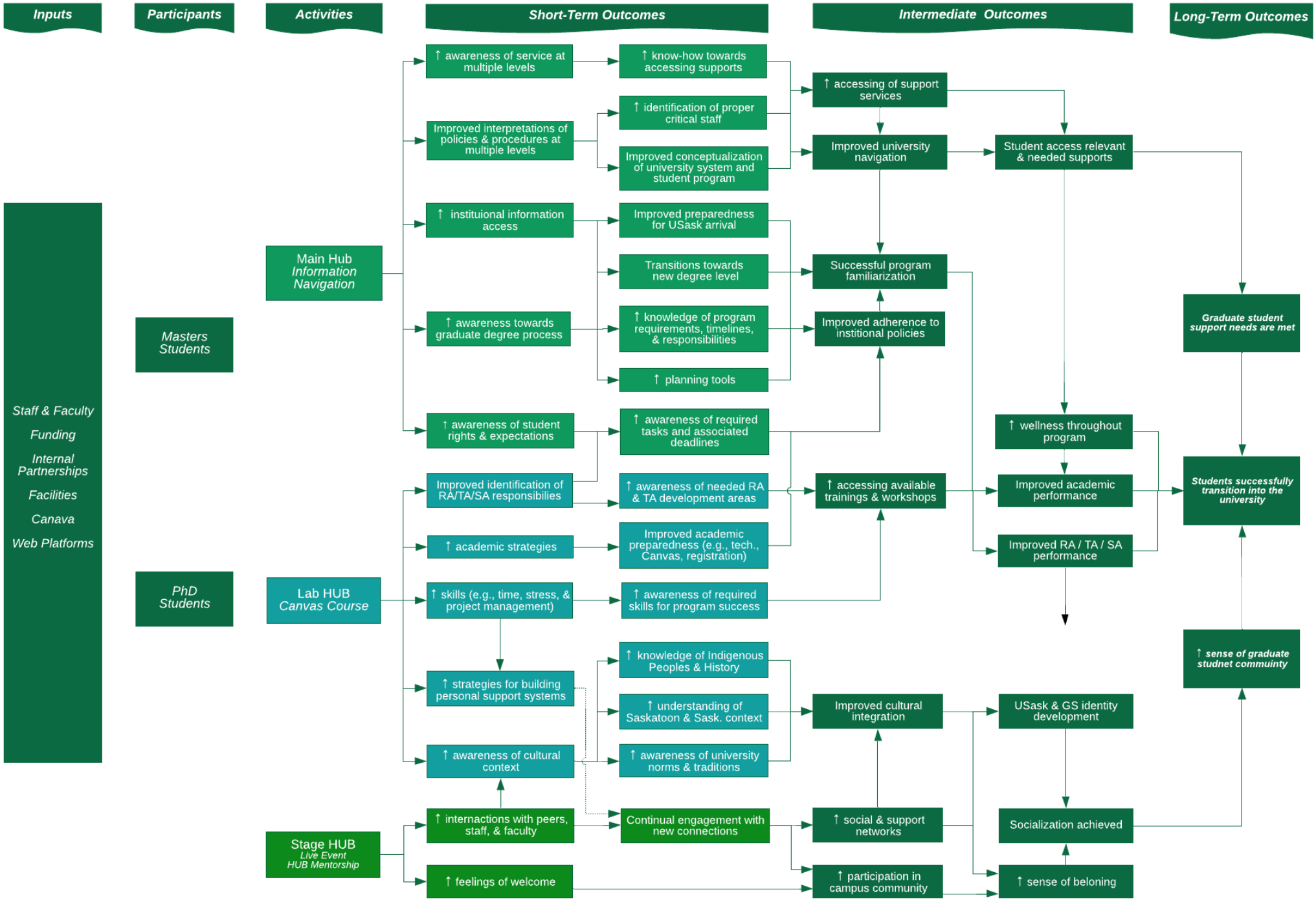
APPENDIX A: PROGRAM LOGIC MODELING



APPENDIX B: ORIENTATION FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Objectives:

- Improving our understanding of students' current perceptions of the University of Saskatchewan's Graduate student orientation.
- Enhancing our understandings of graduate students desired orientation structure.
- Identifying which content should be prioritized from the perspective of graduate students.
- Distinguishing ways to engage with different students' populations throughout the year.
- Pinpointing best ways the CGPS orientation could be improved.

Potential Types of Groups (Make sure different disciplines too)

Dates and times -TBA

Location - Zoom

Format & Questions

What are the best way to communicate to social groups and academic counsel you are interested in?

1. Introductions: names, pronouns, programs, something they are doing for their wellness.
2. What are everyone's perceptions of our current orientation?
3. Have people been to other orientations? What did you like and or dislike about those events?
4. Regarding our orientation, lets talk a little bit about the ways in which the event could be structured.
    - What are your perceptions of how orientation communicates information to new graduate students?
    - What structure do you think our orientation should be following?
        i. Considering a large event, staggered series of videos, online module, what would be best?
        ii. What are the benefits and limitations to each of there approaches?
        iii. What would be best way to connect with you at the start of your program if the format included the incorporation of a video series?
    - In what ways would you like to engage, or not engage, with other students and staff during orientation?
    - What type of content or information should be included in an in-person orientation and what should be included through online content?
5. Let's shift our focus to the orientation content, what is critical for graduate student to learn at orientation?
    - What would you say is important for graduate students to learn about academically?

- What about learning who to go to for what? (supervisor, vs grad chair, vs department, vs college, vs CGPS)
- What about supports and services should this information be included, if so, which ones?
- What about critical graduate student relationships? (Supervisor -> Grad Chairs -> Committee -> student supervisor agreements, etc)
- How important is learning about, and why:
    i. Local Saskatoon contexts (e.g., housing, groceries, food, transportation)
    ii. Differences between undergraduate and graduate programs?
    iii. Lab safety & ethics
- What could our orientation cover to make attending valuable of your time?

6. What are the best ways the CGPS can engage you throughout the year?
    - *This is in regard to graduate student being our champions (not sure the purpose)*
    - How should we communicate messages to different students? What about STEM? Social sciences? Humanities & Fine Arts? What about International students? Domestic? Indigenous?
    - How can we help promote a sense of community amongst graduate students?
7. What do you think should be changed to best improve your orientation experience at the University of Saskatchewan?
8. **Closing:** Final thoughts. Anything else you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX C: ORIENTATION RAPID INTERVIEW GUIDE

Housing Keeping

- Welcome
- Review Consent Form
- If they are disconnected and experience difficulties, they can email me
- Any question
- Start Recording

Tell me a little bit about who you are and where you are studying

1. What are your perceptions of our current orientation, what do you like/dislike?
2. **Regarding our orientation, let's talk a little bit about the ways in which the event could be structured.**
   - What structure do you think our orientation should be following?
     i. What are the benefits and limitations to each of these approaches you mentioned?
     ii. What's the longest video you would watch?
   - In what ways would you like to engage, or not engage, with other students and staff during orientation?
   - What type of content or information should be included through an in-person orientation and what should be included through online content?
3. **Let's shift our focus to the orientation content, what is critical for graduate student to learn at orientation?**
   - What is important for graduate students to learn about academically?
   - What type of supports and services information should be communicated?
     i. (e.g., ways to access, what they offer)
   - And in what way should the information be communicated?
     i. (e.g., video, table)
   - What should graduate students learn regarding critical relationships that are important for graduate student success?
     i. (Supervisor -> Grad Chairs -> Committee -> student supervisor agreements, GSA advocates, etc.)
   - What should graduate student learn about regarding who to go and when for Graduate Student Support?
     i. (Supervisor, vs grad chair, vs department, vs college, vs CGPS, GSA representation?)
4. **What could our orientation cover to make attending valuable of your time?**
5. What do you think should be changed to best improve your orientation experience at the University of Saskatchewan?
6. Closing: Final thoughts. Anything else you would like to discuss?
7. Would you be interested in signing up for the beta testing of the orientation platform when's its finalized in early August?

*Bold questions were identified as the program lead as most important and so the researcher ensured these elements were touched on in all rapid interviews.

APPENDIX D: STAFF & FACULTY SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Questions:

Please type your thoughts and ideas for the College of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies' (CGPS) graduate student orientation into each questions' corresponding textbox..

- What are your perceptions of the CGPS current Graduate Student Orientation? [Textbox]
- From your perspective, what is critical for graduate student to learn or experience at the CGPS's orientation? [Textbox]
- What are your thoughts of how the CGPS communicates information to new graduate students? [Textbox]
- From your perspective, describe any ideas around how the CGPS graduate student orientation be structured (e.g., videos, online content, mobile app)? [Textbox]
- What are some of the benefits to using these different approaches to orientation that you outlined in your previous response? [Textbox]
- Describe any positive elements you have heard about or witnessed at other orientation initiatives that the CGPS should consider including? [Textbox]
- Identify any negative elements have you heard about or witnessed at other orientations the CPGS should consider avoiding? [Textbox]
- Final thoughts. any other feedback you would like to comment on?

Demographic information [Separate page]:

Please record any demographic information you feel comfortable sharing. The demographic data will help us to recognize any patterns across different stakeholder groups. (Optional)

- My role is: [Multiple choice - staff, faculty, staff & faculty, orientation partner]
- I am located within: [Multiple choice – a college; a non-college student service; central administration; external to USask]
- What is your level of engagement in planning your college's or department's graduate student orientation: [Multiple Choice: substantial planning role; assists event planning; consulted around planning; not involved in planning)
- What is your level of engagement with your college's or department's graduate student orientation on the day of: [Multiple Choice: provides oversight on orientation day; leads specific activities or functions on orientation day; provides assistance on orientation day; not involved on orientation day)