



GRADUATE STUDENTS' UNION

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LOCAL 19, CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

The In-Program Master of Philosophy Degree Proposal: A Student-Friendly Initiative

Dear Members of Academic Board,

The Graduate Students' Union supports the proposal by the School of Graduate Studies for the in-program M.Phil. degree. As an organization, we debated this issue numerous times throughout its development process, culminating in a presentation by then-Associate Dean Bernard Katz and subsequent debate at the GSU Council meeting of November 24, 2003.

We speak in favour of the proposal as a student-friendly initiative, and as something that we collectively believe will benefit the current and future generations of graduate students who attend the University of Toronto, for the following reasons:

1. The Ph.D. program is long, with times to completion often exceeding 5-6 years. For many programs, the most significant milestones – qualifying exams, comprehensives, course- and field-work, and language requirements, to name a few – are completed relatively early. Following the completion of those milestones is a lengthy stretch – marked by regular thesis advisory committee meetings in many programs – of research, at the bench or in the library, until the writing of the thesis and final defense. It is during this period that most students withdraw, where they are perhaps most vulnerable to burnout. **The M.Phil. would ideally serve as an additional “staging” or milestone within the doctoral program.**
2. With this additional milestone definition in place, students may experience a **personal benefit**; that being the option to leave the program with a degree should extenuating circumstances take place. Having said that, we do not view the M.Phil. as a consolation prize, or as a drop-out degree; it is, instead, part of a natural progression toward the Ph.D., and a natural end-point as well.
3. With respect to considering the M.Phil a “consolation prize,” we offer the following for consideration: Is the M.Phil. not a more appropriate option than the back-transfer to an M.A. or M.Sc.? How can a 4 or even 5 year M.A. or M.Sc. favourably compare to the normal 1-2 year time to completion for that degree?
4. Although few in number, direct-entry Ph.D. students who already have a Master's would be able to benefit from the M.Phil., as **it would provide them recognition for work accomplished if they need to leave due to mitigating circumstances.**
5. Finally, we believe that the M.Phil **would positively add to the diversity of programs at the University of Toronto.** A criticism of the proposal is that departments have the flexibility and choice to offer (or not) the M.Phil., thus increasing the inequality in doctoral programs at the University. However, it is clear that different fields and disciplines at this University *of their very nature* must have

different degree requirements and milestones, and are therefore by definition unequal, but not any less meaningful.

We have, as an organization, discussed additional merits and criticisms of this proposal, as have the School of Graduate Studies, the Principals and Deans of this University, and has the Academic Policy and Programs Committee of this Board. We have seen beyond that, as well, to the potential that the M.Phil. offers in strengthening the graduate program at this University. The logistics of implementation of the M.Phil. will occupy us for the time of the current generation of graduate students. I ask you to consider the benefits the M.Phil will have on the perspectives and choices of incoming classes of graduate students, and trust that you will decide fairly and well.

Respectfully submitted,

Mahadeo A. Sukhai
GSU President 2004-2005

This document was developed in collaboration with:

Ms. Roberta Tucci, GSU Vice-President (Internal) and Chair, Funding Committee
Ms. Nancy Dawe, Executive-At-Large and co-Chair, Academics Committee
Mr. Anthony Kola-Olusanya, Executive-At-Large and member of SGS Council
Ms. Gina Trubiani, Executive-At-Large and co-Chair, Academics Committee