

Graduate Professional Skills Development Program

School of Graduate Studies, November 2008

Increasingly, universities are recognising a need to develop programs to provide graduate students, especially in the doctoral research stream, with skills beyond those conventionally learned within their disciplinary program. PhD programs typically prepare students exceedingly well for a future in their chosen area of research, but may not have the time or resources to develop other skills critical to success in the wide range of careers students may enter. Such skills include communication, teaching, planning and time management, entrepreneurship, knowledge of ethics in research and intellectual property issues, working effectively in teams, and leadership. The University of Toronto has already a rich array of offerings in what is generally referred to as “professional development;” the School of Graduate Studies proposes to harness this existing strength to produce a Professional Skills Development Program for doctoral-stream graduate students. The goal is to create a framework for coordinating and publicizing existing and new offerings in the area of professional development, for establishing and implementing appropriate criteria to ensure academic standards, and for providing an institutional “seal of approval” to enhance their value to students.

Process

This proposal has been developed through several meetings of a Working Group, whose membership has included: Berry Smith, SGS (chair); Heather Kelly, SGS (co-chair); Jeff Richardson (SGS); Yvette Ali (Woodsworth); Megan Burnett (TATP); Nancy Dawe (GSU); Deanne Fisher (Student Affairs); Jane Freeman (ELWS); Peter Grav (ELWS); Pam Gravestock (OTA); Tim McTiernan/Linda Vranic (VP Research); Jenny Mendelsohn (Library); Joseph Mulongo (GSU); Yvonne Rodney (Career Centre); Ian Simmie (Student Affairs).

The proposal

1. The Professional Skills Development Program (PSDP), will comprise a number of variable weight “offerings” (short courses, workshops, placements, seminars, etc) that will provide a range of optional opportunities for skills development.
2. We anticipate that offerings will initially largely consist of those that already exist, though we hope that new offerings will be created as demand increases and resources are found.
3. Successful completion of the PSDP will require completion of a selection of offerings approximately equal in time commitment to a half graduate course (60 hours), usually spread over one to three years.
4. To ensure breadth, 15 hours must be completed in 3 of the four areas of communication, research related skills, personal effectiveness, and teaching, with the remaining 15 hours from any area.
5. Individual offerings will have a maximum countable time value of between 3 and 10 hours.
6. Successful completion of the PSDP will be indicated on the transcript. Component offerings may be listed in a separate “certificate”, but will not be listed on the transcript.
7. The PSDP will be completely optional, and cannot be required in any particular graduate program.
8. An SGS standing committee will be formed to oversee the Program, and will involve graduate faculty, students, program providers, and SGS personnel. Its mandate will include approving proposed offerings for inclusion in the program. This committee will report annually via the Committee on Student Matters to the Graduate Education Council for information.

Implementation timelines

1. Establishment of PSDP Committee, procedures for offering proposals: October, November 2008.
2. Discussions with offering sponsors, call for proposals: January, February 2009
3. Establishment of set of approved offerings, mechanisms for tracking of registrants, web site preparation: March, April 2009.
4. Program launch, first student registrants: May 2009
5. First program completions: November Graduation 2009.

The program is described more fully at http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/resources/psdp_proposal.htm