

OVERVIEW OF APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In initial deliberations, the Taskforce membership highlighted key issues thought to be faced by graduate students with disabilities, and evolved a multi-pronged research strategy to evaluate the relevance and potential impact of these issues. Where possible, the experience of graduate students with disabilities was reviewed through the lenses of “expectations, experience, impact,” as previously utilized (c.f., Chambers, Sukhai & Bolton, 2011). Given initial concerns about the absolute size of the population of graduate students with disabilities in Canada, and the potential for a low response rate to a survey-based approach, the following five overarching approaches were undertaken by the Taskforce in its research methodology (described in detail in Appendix A; see Figure 1):

1. The National Graduate Experience Survey, a bilingual national survey of graduate students with disabilities (N = 330 consented responses; N = 250 completed surveys). The survey methodology is outlined in Appendix A and the full questionnaire is found in Appendix B;
2. Key informant interviews, focus groups and consultations with relevant stakeholder groups (enumerated in Appendix C);
3. Data mining of existing survey data around financial aid (Chambers, Sukhai & Bolton, 2011);
4. Data mining of student experience survey data (Adaptech Research Network, 2012, provided with consent by the study team); and
5. A comprehensive review of the international academic and grey literature.

Issues identified by multiple modes of research were considered to be cross-validated and objectively defined. On the other hand, issues identified by a single mode of research or through consultation with a single stakeholder group were reviewed in more detail in order to understand whether stakeholder misperception or bias could be identified. Through this review process, data were synthesized and triangulated in order to identify key topics for articulation in discussion papers (see Appendices D-J), and as part of the recommendation framework and final report. Based on the synthesis of data, a series of resources and resource recommendations were also evolved. A flowchart illustrating this process of generating the project outputs is illustrated in Figure 2.

A recommendation framework was evolved around three major components with different target audiences (Figure 3). Professional development resources for students, faculty, service providers and student services/student life professionals were defined to enhance awareness of key issues and educate stakeholders on approaches to mitigate

barriers. Recommended practitioner guidelines were created for service providers, student services/student life professionals and graduate deans to aid these groups in working more effectively on disability, accessibility and accommodation issues. Finally, policy recommendations were evolved from the resource and practitioner guideline recommendations, which could be used by higher education policy makers in systemically enhancing the graduate student with disabilities experience.

Recommendations were evaluated against a framework adapted from lean principles (www.lean.org), measuring effort required for implementation against potential impact after implementation, in order to define the most efficacious recommendations for inclusion in the final report (See **Figure 4**).

After this evaluation process, recommendations were consolidated into 25 key areas. These 25 overarching recommendations were themselves thematically reviewed and grouped into three (3) broad themes: Incorporating Reasonable Accommodation; Leveling the Playing Field; and Building Knowledge (Figure 5). Recommendations are presented in the final report using this synthesis, as defined by the Taskforce.

“I am the first student in my program to request accommodation for a disability. Lack of education/awareness in my department has made this difficult.”