

Accessibility and Graduate Education – a Case-Study Exercise

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Equal Opportunity vs. Equal Outcome

equality

equity

Equality = SAMENESS

Equity = FAIRNESS

Equality is about **SAMENESS**, it promotes fairness and justice by giving everyone the same thing.

EQUITY is about **FAIRNESS**, it's about making sure people get access to the same opportunities.

BUT it can **only work IF everyone starts from the SAME place**, in this example equality only works if everyone is the same height.

Sometimes our differences and/or history, can create barriers to participation, so we must **FIRST ensure EQUITY** before we can enjoy equality.

Learning Objectives

- To provide participants with a thought frame for guiding discussions within their institution on issues faced by graduate students with disabilities
- To provide participants an experiential learning opportunity in which to practice the application of the thought frame
- To illustrate the complexities inherent in issues faced by graduate students with disabilities
- To illustrate the need for collaboration across offices within the University to ameliorate barriers faced by graduate students with disabilities

How will Issues Arise?

- Students may disclose to the disability services office – or not!
- Students may or may not disclose their accommodation needs to their supervisor(s)
- Students may modify or self-implement their own accommodations
- When do graduate registrars/deans get involved?

Consensus on Definitions

- Disability
 - WHO and OHRC definition
- Distinction between “apparent” and “hidden” disabilities
- Accommodation
 - a means of preventing and removing barriers that impede students with disabilities from participating fully in the educational environment in a way that is responsive to their own unique circumstances

Essential Requirements

- "**Essential requirements** of a course or program refer to the knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives of that course or program" (Rose, 2009).

Essential Requirements

- Essential requirements are those skills required for qualification in the discipline.
- Defined by two factors:
 - Skills that must be necessarily demonstrated in order to meet the objectives of a course
 - Skills that must be demonstrated in a prescribed manner

Accommodations and Undue Hardship

- The “**duty to accommodate**” requires that accommodation be provided in a manner that “most respects the dignity of the person, if to do so does not create undue hardship.”
- Only three elements may be considered in assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship: cost; outside sources of funding, if any; and, health and safety requirements, if any.

Undue Hardship

- The institution cannot argue undue hardship based on:
 - business inconvenience
 - employee morale
 - third-party preference
 - collective agreements or contracts

Reactive vs. Proactive Approaches

- Reactive = individualized accommodation
 - Issues must be identified prior to evolving a solution
 - Delay between identification and implementation
- Proactive = Universal design approach
 - Potential systemic issues are identified in the context of an accessible and inclusive graduate environment
 - Actions taken to reduce or remove barriers at the environmental level
 - Students with disabilities may not identify with issues in this context due to removal of barriers

Thought Frame

- What is/are the issue(s) the student faces?
- Are they disability-related? Systemic/structural? Both? Neither?
- Is there any information that you don't have that you feel like you need? Who might have this information? Where can you go to get it?
- Can the student's issues be solved without accommodation or the application of universal design principles?

Thought Frame

- Do they impact on the student's opportunity to participate fully in graduate education?
- What are the likely solutions to these issues? What precedents do you have within the institution?
- Which solutions will meet the duty to accommodate without...
 - Contravening the essential requirements of the program?
 - Demonstrating undue hardship?
- Who do you need to work with to implement these solutions?

Exercise

- Each group will receive a case study, based upon experiences of real students
- Review the case study, and apply the thought frame
- What advice/help would you be able to offer the student, faculty member and/or department?

Group Debrief / Additional Issues

A Complex Case...

- Students with disabilities in graduate education will often not face a single issue, but rather a compound set of issues, both systemic and disability-related, spread out through the length of their program of study

Meet Jananie

- Graduating from a Master's program in anthropology in her home province
- Applying for and will be admitted to a Ph.D. program in physical/human anthropology in Ontario
 - The student is interested in working with a specific thesis supervisor on a specific topic, and is thus not willing to remain in her home province

Our Student's Background

- Student has a compound disability
 - Uses a service animal
 - Requires some modification to the residence suite in grad student housing
- Student has accumulated 8 years' worth of student loans to repay
 - 5 years to complete an honours Bachelor's degree
 - 3 years to complete her Master's program

Description of PhD Program

- Expected time to completion: 5 years
- Course component of 5.0 FCE, to be completed in the first 2 years of the program
- Regular thesis advisory committee meetings, every 6 months
- Weekly seminars/journal clubs throughout the program

Proposal/Examination Requirements

- Comprehensive examination, completed within 18 months of start
- Research proposal due 1 year post-comprehensives
- Fieldwork component of 6 months, with the possibility of extension if necessary
- Oral defense of a written PhD dissertation

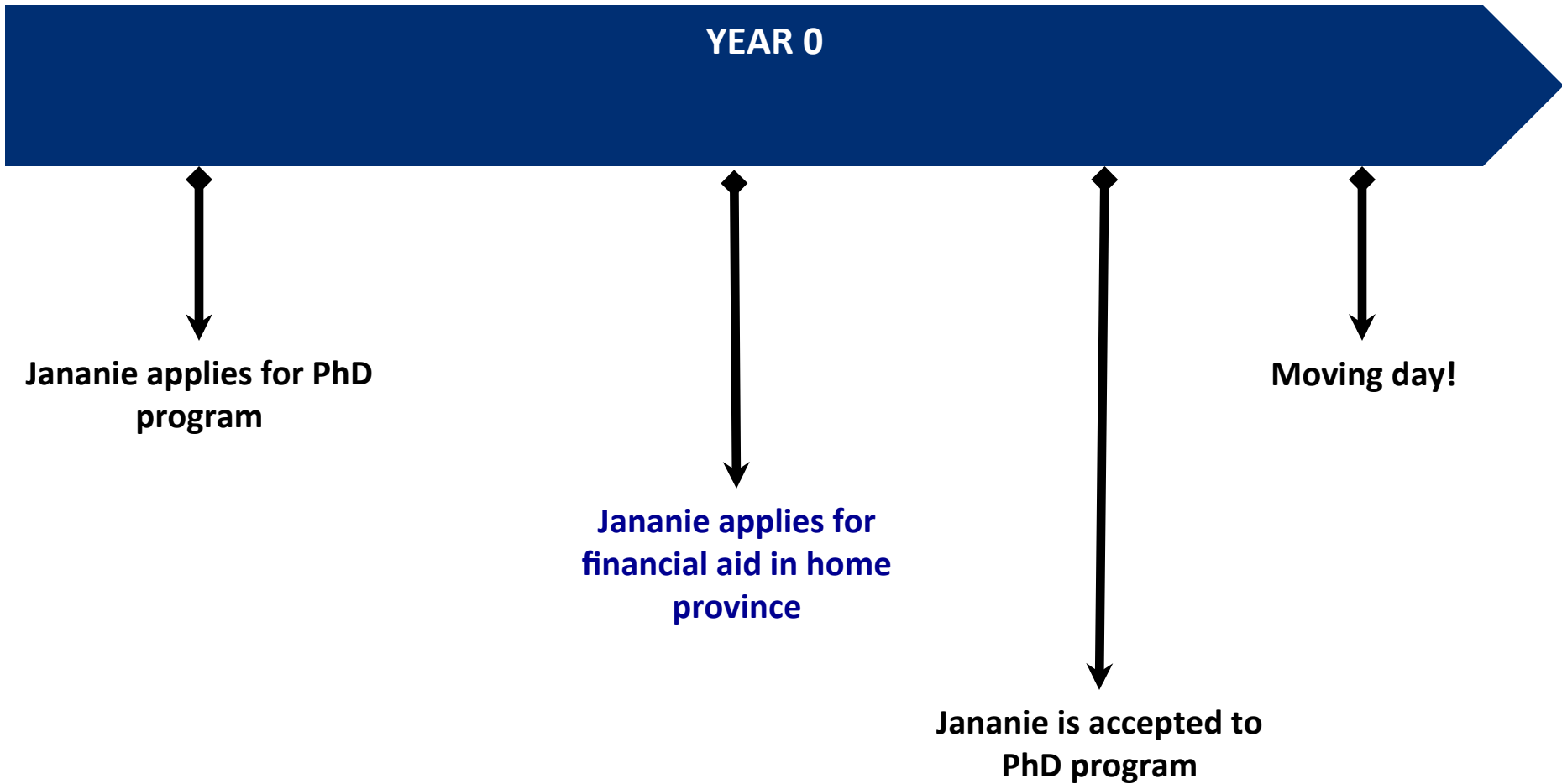
Funding Package

- 4 years guaranteed funding
- Stipend of \$17,000 + tuition per year
- Requirement to TA 210 hours per year
 - If the student chooses not to TA, that part of the funding package is not replaced
- Full time PhD residency requirement – student cannot work more than 10 hours per week outside of TA-ship and the program

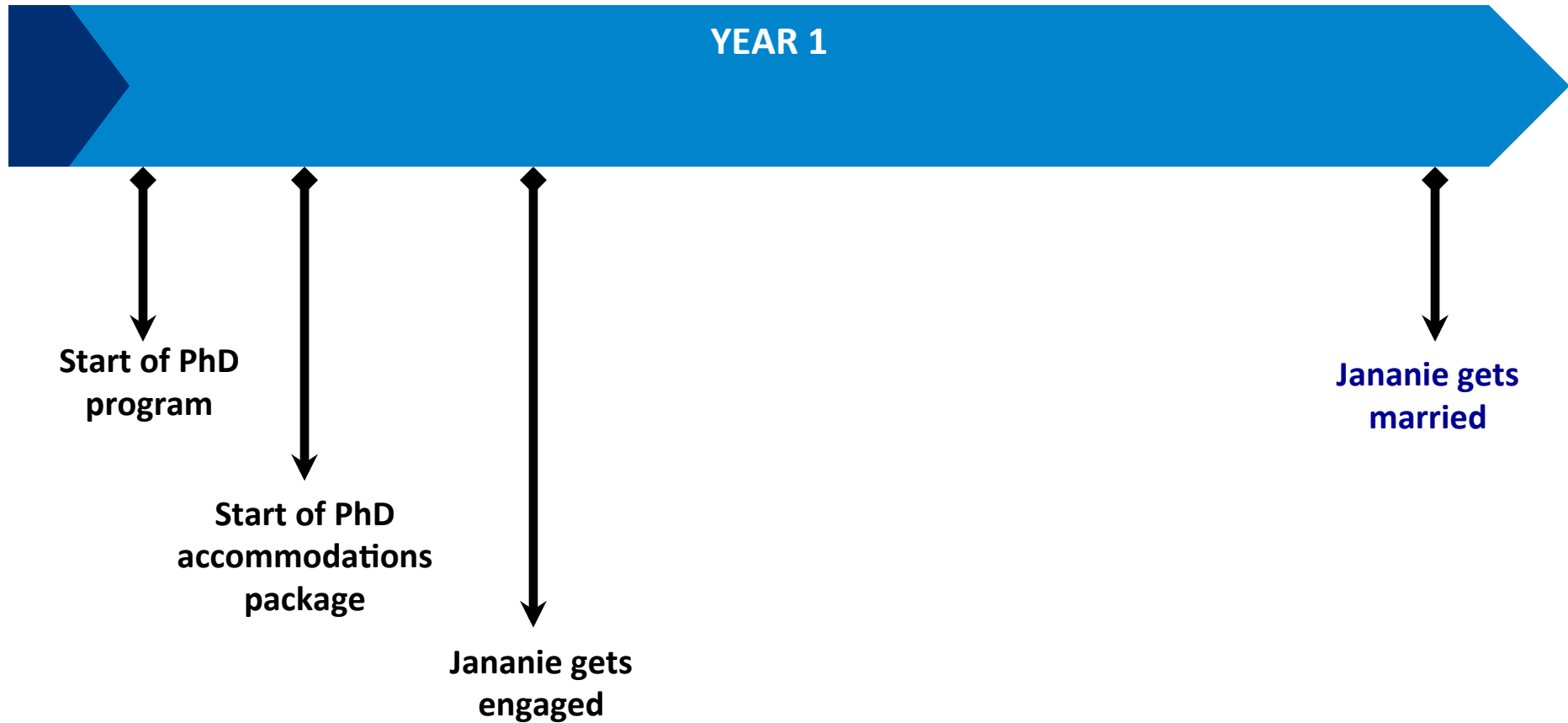
Student's Starting Accommodation Requirements

- Assistive (computer) technology
- Tutor/editor for writing assignments
- Lab/research assistant
- Personal support worker/attendant for fieldwork assignments
- Physical/technological modifications to lab environment

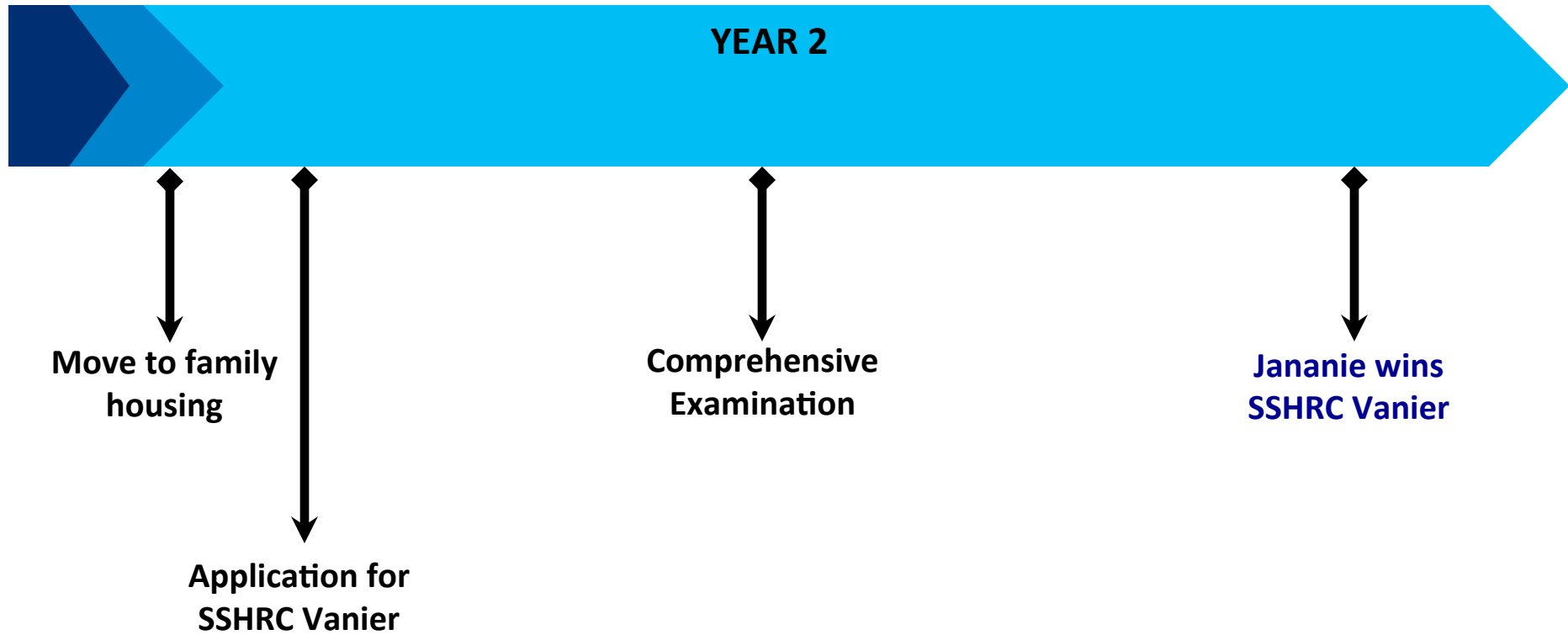
Year 0



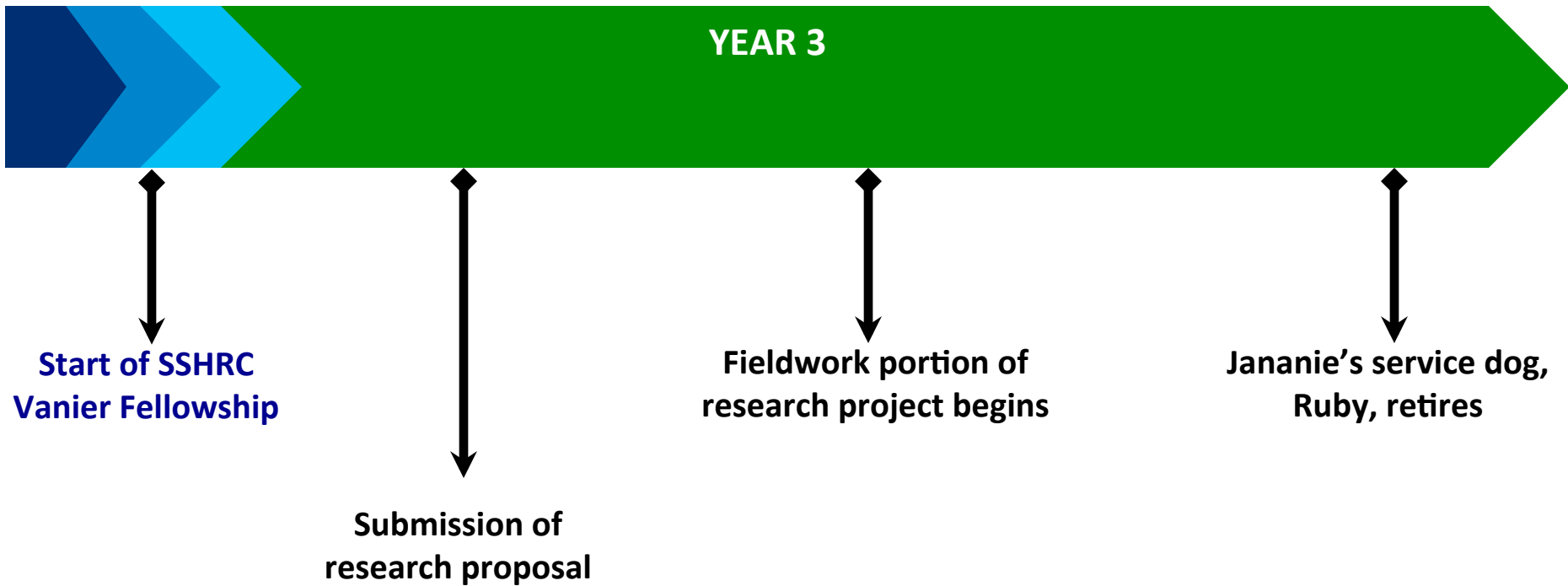
Year 1



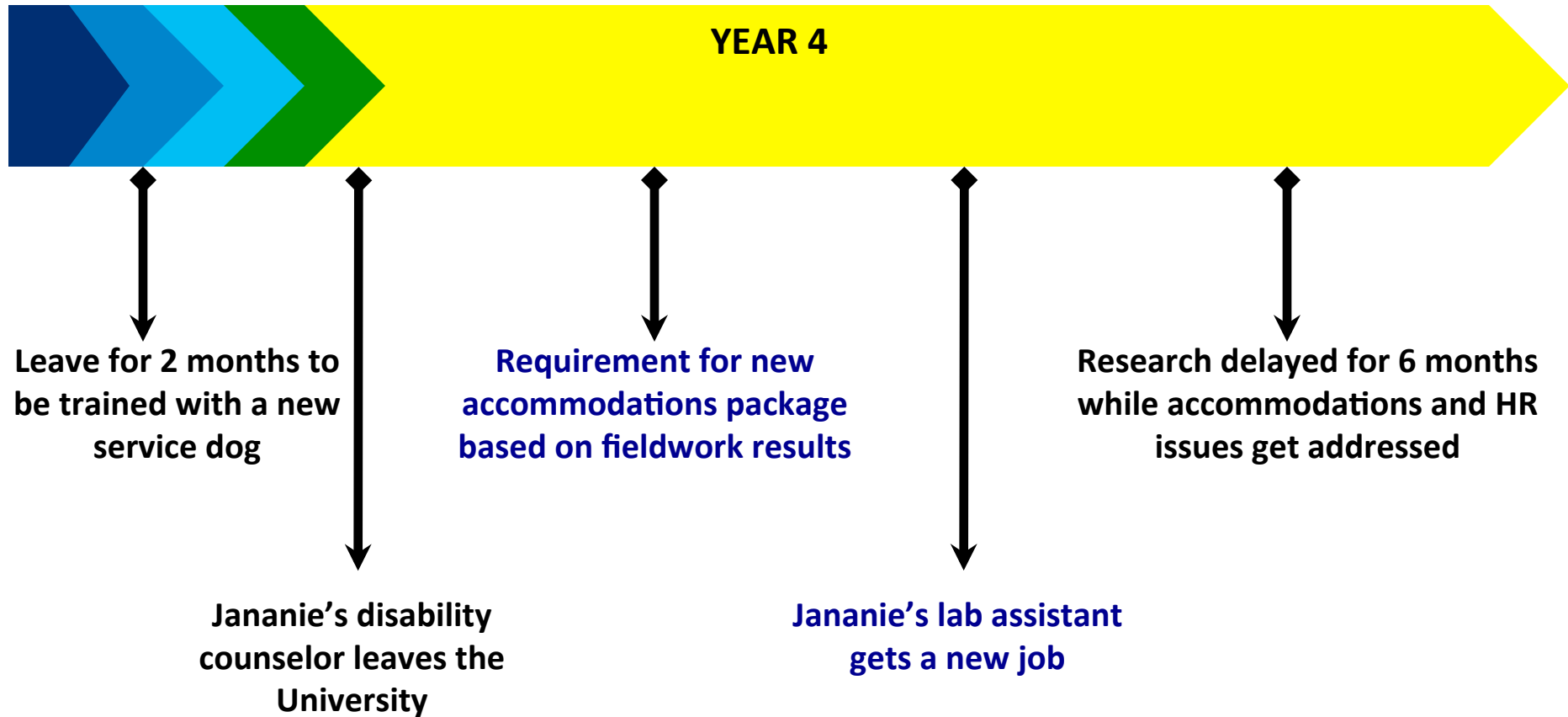
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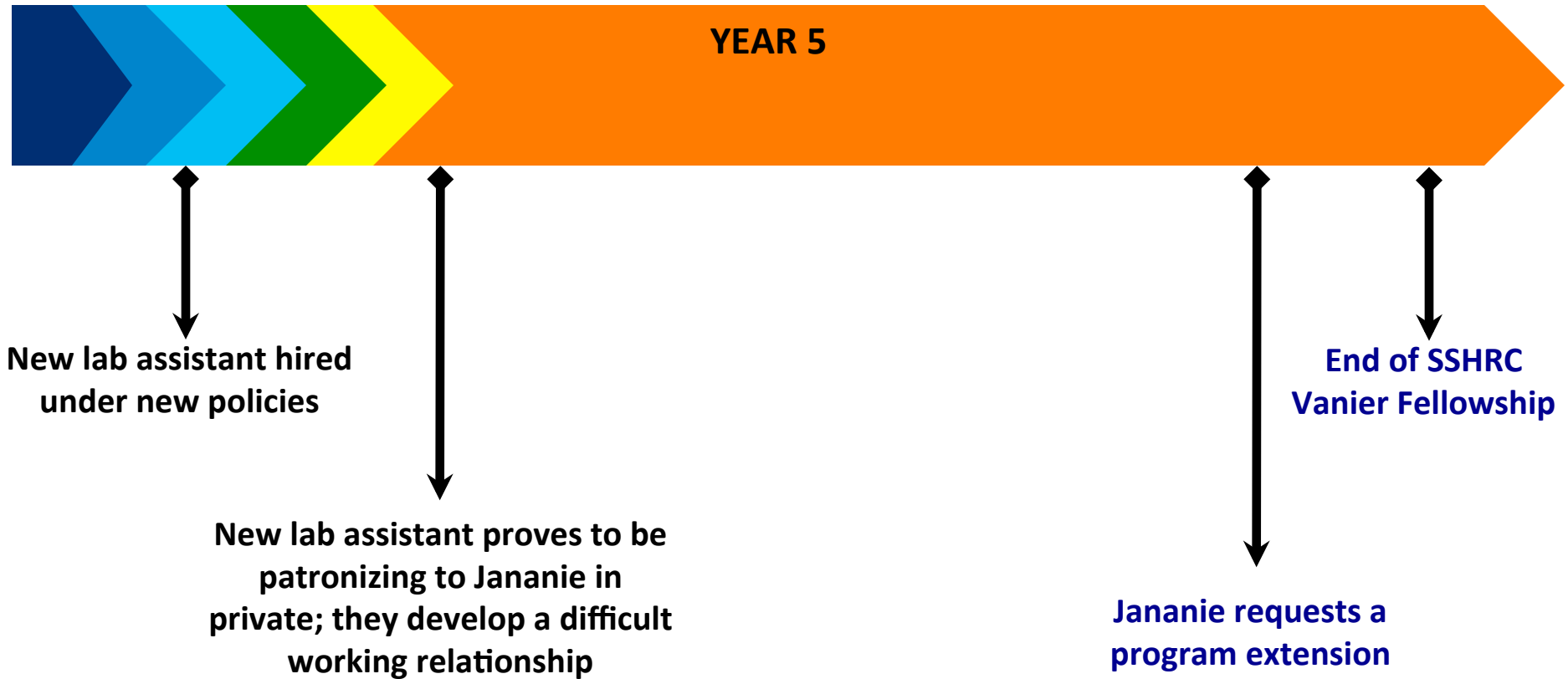
Year 4



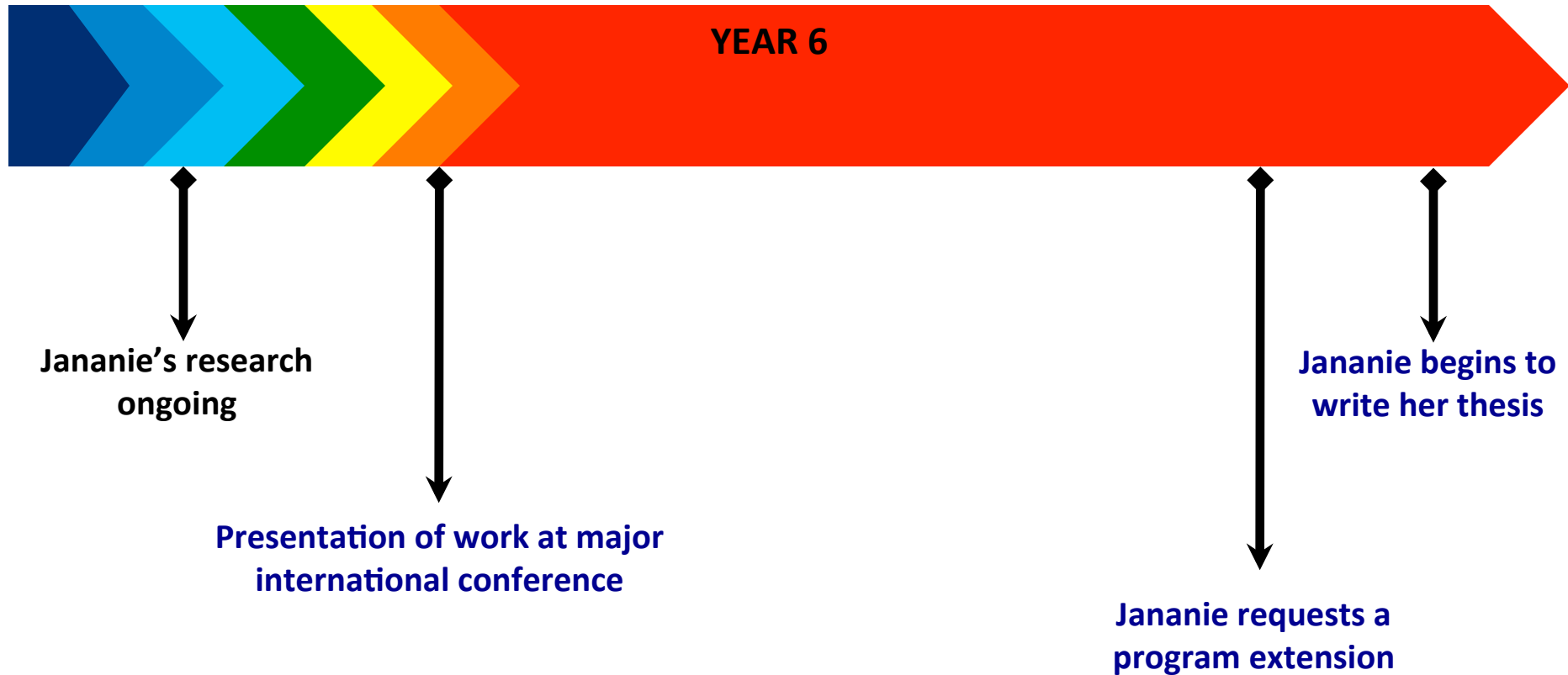
Old vs. New Accommodation Packages

- Original Accommodations Package
 - Assistive technology (computer based)
 - Tutor/editor for class writing assignments
 - PSW/attendant for fieldwork
 - Lab assistant
- New Requirements
 - Physical and technological lab modifications
 - New lab assistant
 - Tutor/editor for papers and thesis
 - Upgraded assistive technology

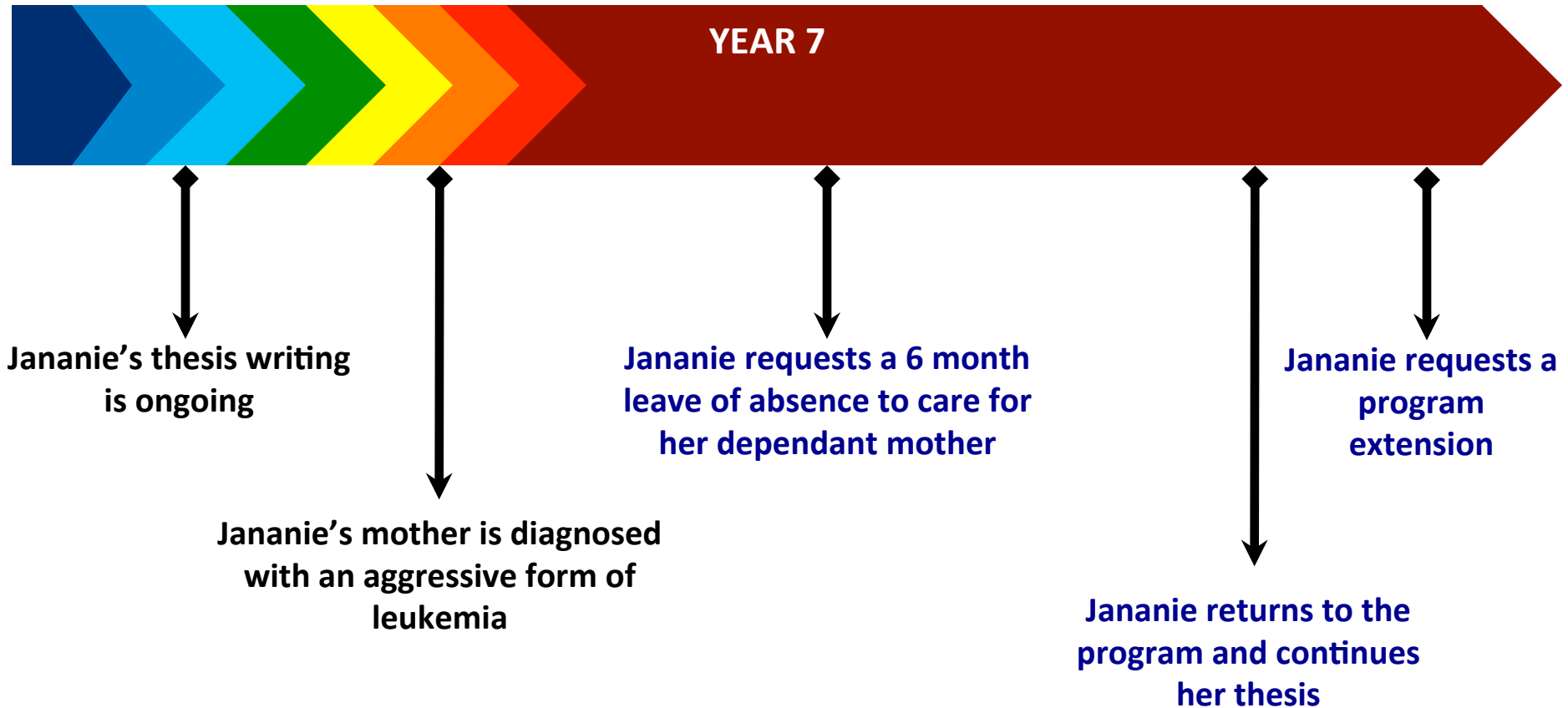
Year 5



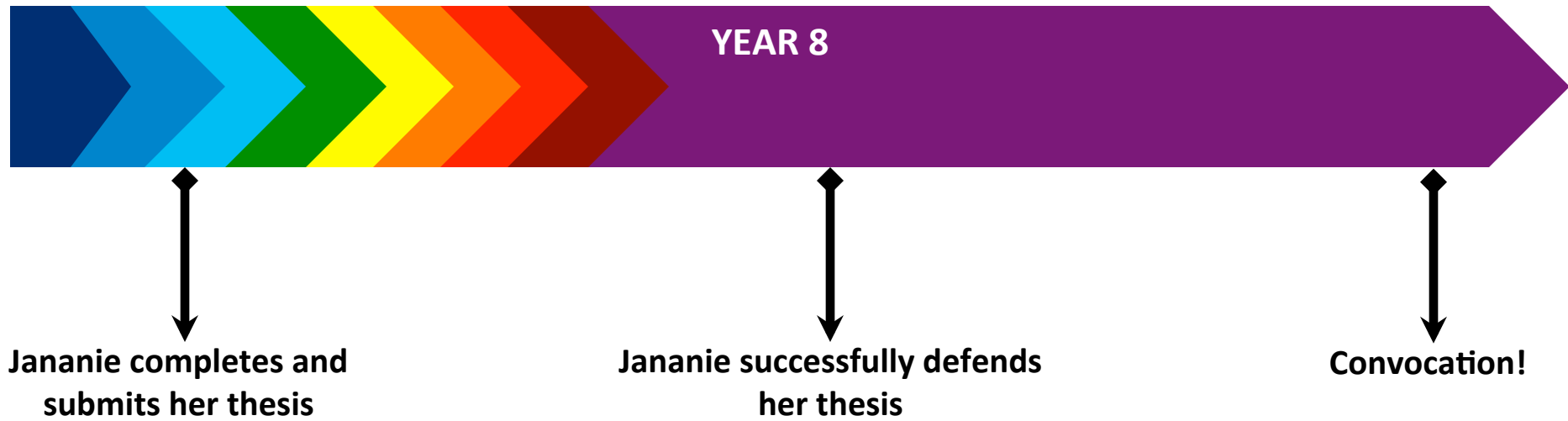
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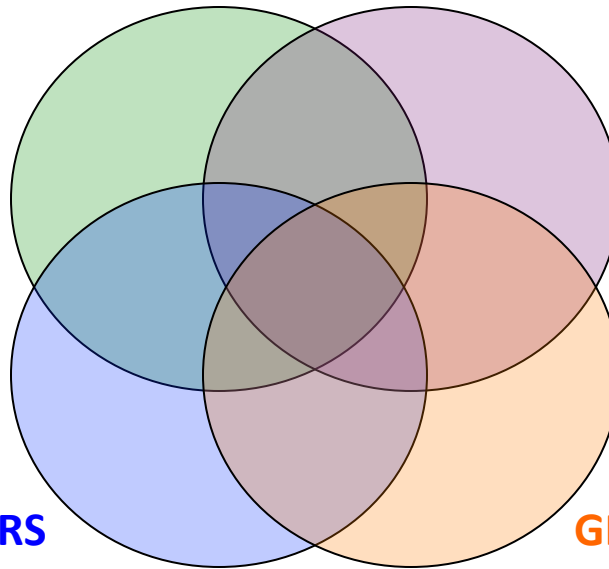
Year 8



The Need for Collaboration

**GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

GRADUATE SUPERVISORS



DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

**GRADUATE SSDs, DEANS,
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS**

Discussion Paper #1: Essential Requirements in Graduate Education

- <http://www.cags.ca/documents/publications/3rdparty/Discussion%20paper%20Essential%20Requirements%20FINAL%202014-09-22.pdf>

Additional Taskforce Discussion Papers

- Disclosure in the Graduate Environment
- Mentorship and the Student/Supervisor Relationship
- Mental Health
- Academic Employment
- Student Financial Aid

Remote Focus Group Consultations

- With graduate deans and graduate registrars
- Purpose – to understand local campus-level policy and practice for working with graduate students with disabilities
- Teleconference focus groups (45-60 minutes in length)
- Weeks of November 17 and 24

Acknowledgements

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- Council of Ontario Universities
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- Canadian Association of Graduate Studies
- Discussion Paper Authors
- National Educational Association of Disabled Students

When We Don't Know, We Tend To Think The Worst

