



Canadian Association  
for Graduate Studies

Association canadienne  
pour les études supérieures

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

October 2011

### **About the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies**

The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) is the national organization that promotes, advances, and fosters excellence in graduate education and research. CAGS was formed in 1962 and provides a venue for dialogue and cooperation for its members – over 60 Canadian universities, two graduate student organizations, the three federal research granting councils, and more than 190,000 graduate students.

For information, please contact 613.562.0949 or visit our website at  
[www.cags.ca](http://www.cags.ca)

## **Background**

The Board of Directors of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies met on May 26-27 in Ottawa to begin the process of establishing a strategic plan for the Association. The meeting was attended by the following persons:

John (Jay ) Doering, President of the Board  
Gary Slater, Vice President of the Board  
Douglas M. Peers, Past President (2010)  
Fred Hall, Past President (2007)  
Pamela Hawranik, Director (West)  
Sue E. Horton, Secretary Treasurer  
Jennifer M. Phelps, Director (Senior Administrators)  
Laurent Viau, Student Association  
Sally Rutherford, Executive Director  
Lise Benoit, Administrator

This report is a summary of the deliberations that took place at that meeting. This report is not meant to represent the Association's final strategic plan; it is intended as a starting point for a more comprehensive consultation process that will be undertaken this summer with the members and key stakeholders. This plan will be formally presented at the Annual Meeting in November, 2011.

## **Pre-Meeting Consultation**

A consultation process with existing and selected past Board members held prior to this meeting highlighted a number of points that Board members agreed on at the meeting. The credibility of the Association is very high; we have a fifty-year history of doing very good work on behalf of our members. Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary presents an opportunity to raise the profile of CAGS.

Our members are dedicated and see the value in the Association and our Annual General Meeting is highly regarded and well attended. Our graduate programs have an excellent reputation both in Canada and internationally – something we can capitalize on in the next few years.

We are well positioned to engage in more meaningful policy dialogue as well as to advocate on behalf of our members as we have a rich network of members and supportive voices to draw on and a capacity to conduct excellent research on the state of graduate education in Canada.

Our relationship with the tri-councils is strong and we have no reason to think that will change although we could be doing a better job of connecting with other Associations.

Due to the unfortunate loss of our very effective Executive Director we have a new team, a good web site that allows us to build for the future and a strong presence in Ottawa developed over the years. Moreover, our dedicated and highly professional staff members want to do meaningful work and are anxious to focus on a few clear priorities.

Regarding the current federal context, it is fair to conclude that strong support for innovation in Science and Technology will continue, especially in light of the emergence of a digital and knowledge international society in which a graduate education is seen as a key to success and the recognition of the increasingly important role graduate studies play in innovation.

Beyond these elements, the consensus opinion emerged that CAGS must continue to play a leadership role in the present national climate as it affects graduate education. This is seen as an important consideration for the CAGS Board going forward. It appears clear the Board members want the Association to be the national body the government turns to for information and planning on graduate education and graduate funding. It also seems critical that CAGS build on its existing capacity to be highly responsive to new government initiatives. In addition, the Association needs to define its relationship with other associations, especially the AUCC and the various organizations that represent graduate students.

A concern exists that as graduate students have other avenues to make their voices heard it might be more appropriate for CAGS to remain focused on the preoccupations and interests of Deans and Administrators of Graduate Studies.

In the most general terms possible, it became clear during this consultation exercise that the Board was united in thinking that the strategic plan should focus on the following broad themes:

- *Increase the Association's relevance and communication to its members*
- *Position the Association so it has more influence with decision-makers*
- *Strengthen the Association's governance*
- *Build stronger relationships with other Associations and stakeholder groups*

## **Current Challenges**

It is important to note, before discussing current challenges facing the Association, that the first meeting of CAGS took place in 1962 at Carleton University in Ottawa. It was at that meeting that the Canadian Association of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (CADDGS) was formed. The aims of CADDGS were stated clearly at that time and, it is fair to say, have not changed substantially in the intervening years.

- 1. To exchange information, experiences and views regarding:*
  - a) The initiation, organization and administration of graduate studies*
  - b) The admission, support and supervision of graduate students*
  - c) The structure of degree programs*
  - d) The promotion of research*
  - e) Other matters of concern to Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies*
- 2. Generally to promote the improvement of Graduate education in Canadian universities.*

This early statement of the “mission” of the Association is useful in trying to decide on the strategic intentions and priorities CAGS should commit to today. In setting up the strategic discussion portion of this meeting, the Board looked at the challenges to be met that made this meeting of the Board of Directors an important step for the Association. They described the following challenges as important to their members:

### ***Ensuring a Strong National Voice***

There can be no doubt that a national organization representing and promoting the interests of graduate studies in Canada is an indispensable national institution. This is especially true in an era characterized by the growth of the knowledge economy, the trans-nationalization of every human endeavour and the daunting global challenges facing humanity. A strong Association for Graduate Studies is needed to help graduate programs, offered in almost every university in Canada, speak with a national voice on issues of common concern and collaborate on shared challenges. It is important that the framework

underlying graduate program excellence is well understood and properly managed throughout the system in order to ensure ongoing citizen confidence.

Universities, by the very nature of their mandate, are always challenged to meet a society's needs in responsive and effective ways. This is especially true of graduate programs. These programs must keep up with a fast-changing intellectual, cultural and financial environment and work hard to maintain relevance for both students and society at large. In addition to this somewhat daunting challenge, graduate schools occupy a unique position within the university. The work of a graduate school can cut across many faculties that have control over budgets, physical resources, faculty appointments and teaching assistant funds. This unique administrative situation often places Deans of Graduate Studies in difficult situations that require a sophisticated understanding of the national landscape and of best practices in other institutions.

### ***Renewing Our Focus***

This meeting is an opportunity to retool and refocus the Association in a challenging environment. Graduate Studies are in need of a strong national voice today for a variety of inter-connected factors. National decisions have an impact on funding support and CAGS has an important role in informing these decisions. In addition, questions abound about the value of graduate studies to society, competition is growing from international suppliers and student demands for a more enriching student experience are growing.

### ***Recalibrating Membership***

There is a growing sense that the Association needs to take another look at its membership structure. At the moment we have five types of members. This can be quite confusing in understanding how different categories of members are expected to interact with the Association. In addition, graduate students as well as the Tri-Councils are currently voting members of the Board. We need to revisit this arrangement as this may place these representatives in a potential conflict of interest. The role of graduate students on the board seems somewhat redundant as they already have their interests represented through the various student associations. This may be an especially important conversation given that the original intention of the Association was to represent the concerns of Graduate Deans of Graduate Studies and no record exists recording how graduate students came to be voting members.

### ***Connecting Members with Each Other***

Graduate Deans across the country, many of whom are facing the same pressures and challenges, need to stay connected so they can explore how emerging issues are impacting their programs and institutions and share best

practices as they create a true community of practice across institutional boundaries. Technology can be used to connect people in ways never before imagined. Although CGS is an important and reliable source of information, the Association should strive to become the go-to virtual space for Graduate Deans in Canada searching for information on best practices and seeking to engage in a dialogue on emerging trends and challenges.

### ***Increasing Research Capacity***

There is a need to strengthen our research capacity in order to be in a position to make a business case based on data and analysis of trends. Defending the value of graduate programs will rely more than ever on sound research supported by data; it will no longer be plausible to base these efforts on an emotional appeal unless that appeal is supported by a strong business case.

### ***Taking the Lead on Data Availability***

Access to comprehensive data across institutional boundaries is more important than ever. The Association has an opportunity to take the lead in ensuring the consistency and availability of data that will assist Deans, institutions, and government to make better and timelier decisions

### ***Taking a More Proactive Approach to Advocacy***

In order to create a strong national Association, it is clear a more proactive approach to advocacy will be needed, one that does not rely on particular executives. This will in turn require a capacity to produce timely policy papers, supported by research and emerging best practices that position the Association as an indispensable participant at a variety of national tables and forums. This will require a commitment to holding regional meetings, webinars and workshops in order to gather relevant views and proposals that can be debated at national meetings where a strong consensus can be reached.

### ***Developing a Higher Profile***

The Association is an indispensable tool in helping to raise the national profile of the voice of the Deans of Graduate Studies at the Federal level. The federal government is deeply involved in graduate studies in a variety of ways. It transfers funds to the provinces, through the Tri-Councils it provides direct support to many graduate students, it supports basic and applied research directly through a variety of funding mechanisms, it oversees student loans and it is deeply involved in helping Canadian universities attract foreign students to graduate programs in Canada. Deans are a unique voice in helping to shape a national framework and agenda that can improve the way the federal government plays these various roles.

The profile of the Association needs to be raised among its core members as well but also among secondary stakeholders that include other university leaders, undergraduate and graduate students and other important Associations, both nationally and internationally. In a world of shrinking resources and pressure to ensure value for money, the opportunity to collaborate on cross cutting issues is an important strategic consideration.

### ***Taking advantage of the Rise of Social Media***

The growing use of social networking tools makes information travel instantaneously and raises expectations regarding availability of information and people. This phenomenon places a great deal of pressure on institutions to respond to student demands for just-in-time information and 24/7 access.

### ***Influencing the Government's New Science and Technology Policy***

The Association should strive to be a powerful voice in helping the federal government understand how to create strategic S & T cohesion, build critical research mass, leverage matching investments, introduce competitively driven excellence into our publicly funded research project and break down the silos between university researchers and business managers.

### ***Adapting to the Changing Profile of Graduate Students***

Our graduate institutions have had to and will have to continue to adjust to the changing profile of the typical graduate student. Many graduate students are studying part-time (although the proportion seems to be falling for the moment), over 60% are female and there is more diversity than ever before in the make-up of our student population. In addition, it is clear that, even at the graduate level, parents are more involved in their children's education than ever before. These changes are quite new and taken as a cluster, can present Deans with significant challenges in trying to adjust programs to meet these varying and sometimes conflicting needs and expectations.

### ***Attracting Foreign Students to Canada***

Policy makers often underestimate the benefits to Canada of attracting foreign students to Canadian graduate programs. Countries are engaging in a veritable "brain race" as they appreciate that their ability to attract the best and brightest international students results in significant economic benefits to a society. A number of countries (including Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France to name but a few) have instituted an aggressive policy for attracting a greater number of international students. We must help policy makers appreciate that Canada is well positioned to win this race by emphasizing that many graduate students decide to stay in Canada and go on to contribute their skills and energy to Canadian society while many others build relationship with

Canadians that have far-reaching benefits over the longer-term. The Association has a unique opportunity to make the case that a strong and well-coordinated effort to attract these students to Canada should be a high priority. This is a daunting task as competition for the best and the brightest in now global as Universities in the new economies such as China and India are now aggressively seeking out students from around the world. It will be important to take advantage of the fact that Canada's reputation in the world of academia is still very strong and is in fact growing.

### ***Managing the Trend to Credentialing***

The growing popularity and acceptance of a credentialing society is bound to continue to have serious consequences for graduate education. Many Deans and professors have expressed concern with the state of higher education as it relates to the desire for credentials at the expense of genuine learning.

### ***Attracting More Aboriginal Students***

The concentration of aboriginal students in a few predictable disciplines is a subject of genuine concern as Universities struggle to attract more aboriginal students to a wider variety of graduate programs. The Association can support Universities in developing a strategic framework designed to address the needs of aboriginal students. These areas could include instituting innovative programs and services designed to recruit and retain Aboriginal students, distinguishing its degree and certificate programs by their breadth and by the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in the curriculum, funding research directly related to Aboriginal peoples, helping faculty, students, and staff be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the history and culture of Aboriginal peoples, providing opportunities to understand and celebrate Aboriginal language and culture both on campus and in the Aboriginal community and, finally, being more visible, engaged, and knowledgeable about community issues and participating in locally-based research projects that are immediately relevant to Aboriginal communities.

### ***Accommodation and Accessibility***

Universities are increasingly aware of the needs of students with special needs and are endeavoring to meet them. The identification and provision of accommodation and accessibility to graduate students is both a challenge and a priority for Deans and Administrators.

### ***Improving Student Mobility***

Mobility is increasingly important to the education of graduate students. One key factor in Canada's national strategy for research and development must be the training, nurturing and mentoring of graduate students. An integral part of this

strategy should be to provide graduate students with the opportunity to experience and contribute to research excellence at the national level by providing them with the perspective achieved by understanding various initiatives taking place in different parts of the country. Direct involvement in research at places other than their home institution will provide this insight, broaden their skills, help them to mature as researchers, and build networks of personal contacts at a national level. In addition, their experiences in different regions of Canada will increase their understanding of the nation and its heterogeneity, making them more enlightened Canadian citizens.

### ***Managing Financial Constraints***

Financial pressures are a concern for every educational system but no more so than for graduate education. Funding levels are generally static and costs are rising. These budgetary constraints are bound to grow more intense as income support programs bear a heavier burden during Canada's slow return to pre-recession employment levels. A number of developments are having an impact on University costs and expenditures. In today's global economy the pursuit of quality academic scholars is not limited to national or provincial borders; this affects a public University's ability to compete for quality faculty. In addition, funders are asking Universities to eliminate duplication and overlap by differentiating their offerings and by looking closely at their administrative overhead costs. The Association will have an important role to play as the debate over funding levels intensifies in the coming years.

### ***New Pathways – New Challenges***

A secondary factor associated with fiscal pressures is the growing competition for funds and students. This development places pressure on a variety of relationships at both the institutional and Association level that will have to be well managed. The Association will have a key role to play as our members adapt to this new reality.

### ***Improving Market Awareness***

As education is increasingly regarded as a commodity, it is more important than ever for Canadian universities to have as much detailed knowledge as possible about their status in the educational marketplace, the profile and expectations of their students, and their national and international competitors. With competition increasing for students, analyzing these factors will become less optional in the coming years.

## **Proposed Mission, Strategic Intentions and Activities**

### ***MISSION***

***Provide leadership and foster collaboration to advance excellence in graduate education, research and scholarship.***

***We accomplish our mission through partnership, advocacy, research and innovation in policy and practice.***

In order to support the accomplishment of the Mission, the Association engages in four separate but complementary activities:

### **Partnership/Collaboration**

We aim to work with government and other organizations to accomplish the goals set by CAGS members as laid out in the following themes.

### **Research**

We sponsor and encourage research that allows us to contribute in a meaningful way to the debate and discussion on topics important to our members.

### **Advocacy**

We take positions regarding specific policy and program questions and advocate on behalf of the interests and concerns of our members.

### **Innovation**

We encourage and support innovative programs and policies and provide opportunities where these leading edge approaches can be collaborated upon and shared.

**CAGS Goals by Strategic Theme**

**STRATEGIC THEME 1**

Encouraging  
Internationalization of  
Graduate Studies

**Graduate Studies continues to evolve. Canada welcomes graduate students from abroad and sends students to study in other countries. CAGS understands that joint degrees and ‘cotutelles’, are increasingly possible as are studies available on line around the world.**

**STRATEGIC THEME 2**

Career Path and the Future of  
Graduate Degrees

**As Graduate Studies and the opportunity for employment in and outside of the academy shift, education and training of students also needs to change. CAGS supports new educational pathways, new programs. New skills development opportunities are required for success.**

**STRATEGIC THEME 3**

Student Support

**Support for Graduate Students is an imperative. CAGS promotes the increased accessibility and accommodation of programmes, through cultural, physical and social means.**

**STRATEGIC THEME 4**

Enabling Environment

**As well as academic and social supports, legal and ethical underpinnings are necessary to achieve a quality graduate education. CAGS works to ensure that the appropriate policies are in place to enable graduate students to achieve their goals.**

**Themes Associated With Each Strategic Intention**

<b>1. Internationalization</b>	<b>2. Career Paths/Future of Graduate Degrees</b>	<b>3. Student Support</b>	<b>4. Enabling Environment</b>
1.1 Student Mobility	2.1 Professional and Transferable Skills	3.1 Language Skills for International Students	4.1 Intellectual Property
1.2 Joint Degrees	2.2 Links to Labour Markets	3.2 Progress to Degree	4.2 Ethics
1.3 Recruitment	2.3 Career Outcomes	3.3 Attracting for Aboriginal Students	4.3 Research integrity
1.4 Distance Education	2.4 Time to Graduation	3.4 Funding	4.4 Student Advisor Agreements
1.5 Visas	2.5 Quality of programs	3.5 Accommodation and Accessibility	4.5 Copyright
1.6 Language	2.6 Direct Entry Ph.D.	3.6 Quality of Supervision	4.6 Accountability
1.7 Student Transition	2.7 Post-Doctoral Studies	3.7 Mental Health and Stress	4.7 Nature of a Dissertation
1.8 Funding International Students	2.8 Internships and Co-operative Programs	3.8 Mentoring	4.8 Legal Liability
1.9 Cultural Literacy of Faculty	2.9 On line programs	3.9 Program Structure	4.9 Use of technology in engagement and teaching
1.10 International Agreements	2.10 Availability of Common data	3.10 Representation	
1.11 Recognition and Credentials		3.11 Admissions	

## **Benefits of the Strategic Plan**

A widely supported and properly executed strategic plan will allow us to realize our potential as an Association and increase our effectiveness in a number of key areas.

Executing this plan will help sharpen our focus in four specific areas important to our members: promoting and facilitating internationalism, improving career paths and the future of degrees, offering students more support and creating a more enabling environment for graduate studies programs.

Executing this plan will increase our profile and influence. Many of our members believe we could be more assertive in getting our message across as Deans of Graduate Studies regarding public discussion of issues that directly affect us (such as the framework for science and technology policy or attracting international students to Canada, to give two examples).

Executing this plan will help us take a more assertive and comprehensive approach to promoting high standards for Canadian graduate studies and the contribution of graduate studies to Canadian innovation and prosperity.

Executing this plan will help us strengthen our research capacity and do a better job of publicizing best practices in policy and programs.

Executing this plan will increase our level of engagement with our members. By providing them with a platform so they can share best practices and engage in ongoing discussions on topics of interest to them, the Association will be seen as providing an essential service.

Executing this plan will help us strengthen the systemic links with other Associations and stakeholders. We will be strengthening these links by encouraging and assisting the dissemination of our research initiatives to broader audiences in the policy community.

We know that public funding for graduate studies rests on demonstrating impacts in the real world. Executing this plan will better enable Canadian citizens and their governments to appreciate the pivotal role that graduate research and learning play in anticipating and shaping emerging trends and in creating new ideas, products, services and work practices that contribute to the public good.

Executing this plan will improve our ability to track and publish the baseline data that informs the state of graduate studies in Canada regarding key issues such as time to completion, scholarly publishing, intellectual property, program structure, student profiles, career paths, international agreements, accessibility and a variety of other topics important to our members and decision-makers.

Fulfilling this plan will help us modernize our bylaws and our membership framework which will in turn guarantee that we remain relevant to our members and viable for the long-term.