What is the Grad CRC?

Since launching in January 2016 the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre (Grad CRC) has drawn attention to key challenges facing graduate students and addressed specific recommendations raised in various surveys and reports\(^1\) including:

**Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health (Oct. 2014)**

3.3. Create programming for graduate students that will foster a greater sense of community within and across departments and faculties, and enhance support for graduate students in their interactions with their supervisors.

4.1 Enhance programming for students that has a focus on personal skill development, including individual resilience, coping skills, problem solving, and self-advocacy.

4.2 …consider creating community-specific peer support, for example graduate student peer support….

The Grad CRC is a partnership of SGS, the UTGSU and Student Life. The Grad CRC aims to:

- Help graduate students better navigate the resolution of conflict within a large and complex university and mitigate feelings of isolation and fear in dealing with conflict in the graduate context; and

- Help all members of the graduate community better understand and access best practices for managing, resolving and preventing conflict.

Our initiatives include:

- A unique graduate peer support team (G2G / grad-to-grad Peer Advisors) that includes intensive training and a low-barrier (“No issue is too small to discuss.”) approach that is intended to address feelings of isolation and fear among graduate students with respect to the resolution of conflict;

- Informal and confidential support for all members of the graduate community dealing with conflicts within the university context (i.e. conflict coaching);

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\(^1\) See also Recommendation 1 from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) Graduate Taskforce report (June 2016), the results of the Canadian Graduate and Professional Survey (Fall 2013), the concerns raised in the Graduate Students’ Union Harassment, Discrimination & Abuse Report (2011), and the Report of the University Ombudsperson (2014-2015) which notes “As a proportion of their total number, graduate students continue to be the biggest student users of the Office.”
• Referrals to and collaborations with existing campus resources that also support students through stressful and challenging academic and personal situations;

• Conflict management skills training for students, faculty and staff.

**Insights from the 2017/2018 year in review:**

• 200 students, staff and faculty connected with the GradCRC for individual conflict coaching

• 167 graduate students, 14 staff and faculty, 19 other, including post-docs, undergrads, alumni or individuals who did not say what their affiliation was to U of T

• 59% of the time the person was upset for at least part of the conversation

• 46% of our conversations were longer than 45 minutes – 22% over 1 hour

• We make a lot of referrals, including to: SGS (Supervision Guidelines), UTGSU advocacy services), Department/Supervisors, Student Life/Gradlife, Good2Talk helpline, etc.

• We facilitated 47 conflict management workshops/talks for 559 students & 209 staff/faculty

• G2G Peer Advisors produced an amazing 7 videos reaching an audience of 1600+!

“In my role as a peer advisor, it still surprises me how much work it takes to cultivate skills like active listening and empathy. I do not believe these are attributes people explicitly have or lack; rather they require consistent attention for us to hone. …Working in academic fields, which often are a marketplace of ideas, listening might not come as naturally to us, but the benefits are immeasurable.”

- G2G (2017-present)

**What we talked about in 2017/2018:**

Most people were simply looking for a listening ear, and many described complex, multi-issue situations; 200 conversations yielded discussions about 343 issues. Top issues were:

• **19% Supervision** related issues, including communicating with supervisors or committee members, expectations about supervisory roles/responsibilities and/or guidance
- **9% Escalating/ Policies/ Processes** – i.e. who to talk to/how and when to escalate concerns
- **8% Conflict resolution & communication strategies**
- **8% Interpersonal issues/conflict - academic but not supervisory** - including relationships with other students (labmates, roommates), TAs, faculty

> “Beyond understanding the resources on campus, I have learned how to break down situations into manageable components. Sometimes students come to us for help, but do not know what part of their situation they need help with. In these situations, I have learned to piece out different parts to a problem so that the student can identify what areas they would like to work on.” – **G2G 2017-present**

**No issue is too small to discuss!**

Any member of the graduate community can connect confidentially with the Grad CRC. We offer appointments (in-person, Skype/phone), as well as informal drop-in sessions at a number of locations across the university.

Visit our website for [TIPS & ADVICE](#) and more information about our service.

**Website:** gradcrc.utoronto.ca

**Email | Phone:** gradcrc@utoronto.ca | 416-978-8920

**Appointments:** clnx.utoronto.ca [GradCRC Appointments calendar]

**Drop-ins:** clnx.utoronto.ca [GradCRC Events calendar]

**Twitter:** @GradCRCUofT [advertising day of drop-ins]

**Blog/Video link:** gradcrc.utoronto.ca/blog/

We are listening – please contact us with questions or comments.
2017/2018 - A year in the life of a graduate student:

SEPTEMBER

- Masters student connected with G2G about feeling graduate courses are much heavier than expected and the stress/pressure is much greater.
- PhD student working closely with a fellow PhD student and now their relationship has deteriorated; wanted to talk about repairing relationship and/or establishing new boundaries.

OCTOBER

- PhD student concerned about completing degree in light of changes in personal circumstances.
- Masters student wants to find a way to deal with a difficult roommate; talked with G2G about strategies for negotiating a mutually acceptable schedule for studying.

NOVEMBER

- PhD student worried about lack of communication and hardly ever meeting with thesis supervisor.
- Masters student wanted to talk about scheduling, time management and setting boundaries with supervisor and co-supervisor.

DECEMBER

- PhD student wanted advice from G2G on having a difficult conversation with supervisor; discussed communication strategies.
- Masters student in difficult financial situation concerned about academic progress and wanting advice on how to escalate a concern beyond their professor/department.

JANUARY

- PhD unhappy about comments received at recent committee meeting and distrust between the student, their supervisor and committee members that has emerged as a result.
- Masters student says supervisor is unresponsive and does not seem interested in project anymore.

FEBRUARY

- Grad student shared upsetting conversation they had had with a colleague about patterns of behaviour in department; wanted to talk about what Grad CRC might be able to do.
- Masters student feeling isolated and unmotivated to finish thesis.
MARCH

- Masters student struggling with decision of whether to finish masters or pursue a PhD, and wanted to strategize how to have this conversation with their supervisor.
- PhD student nearing end of program increasingly concerned about time to completion because their supervisor has not been responding to emails.

APRIL

- Masters student described a disagreement with an instructor over a final grade, and wanted to talk about the options/resolutions proposed by the instructor and the department.

MAY

- PhD student says they have a very unsupportive supervisor and as a result, they want to change research environments.
- Masters student experiencing problems with a lab staff member and does not feel they are getting support they should be getting from their principal investigator (PI).

JUNE

- PhD student and G2G talked about different supervisory styles and the importance of having early conversations about supervisory expectations.
- Masters student is looking for tips on how to communicate with supervisor and feel comfortable asking questions about direction of thesis.

JULY

- PhD student looking for career advice and wanting to talk about what happens next, given that feeling anxious about graduating and finding a job.
- Masters student has issues with current supervisor and wants to consider changing supervisors; talked with G2G about how to approach potential supervisors.

AUG

- PhD student wondering about where to go with their program and research given they feel they are at odds with their supervisor.

I’ve gained an appreciation of the complexity of issues that students can encounter during their graduate education which can often be exacerbated by power dynamics, cultural differences, mental health issues, systemic barriers, and the ‘culture of excellence’ at the University. I found it surprising that most of the issues and conflicts that students approached me about was fairly consistent across programs, departments, and levels of study.” –G2G 2017/2018