

**Dalhousie University  
Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**Access and Success for Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian Graduate  
Students: Action Plan**

Report prepared for Dean Marty Leonard by Acting Associate Dean Fiona Black

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## Introduction

### Respect—Acknowledgements

This report stems from a listening project over many years. I have been privileged to learn from faculty and staff colleagues, both Indigenous and Black, some of whom are Mi'kmaq and some of whom are African Nova-Scotian. I have been equally privileged to teach and work with graduate students from these communities. I have learned new things and gained critical insights from all of them. I am very grateful to those colleagues and students who have informed me over this past year about specific challenges impeding graduate study. I acknowledge, with humility, that my learning is only partial and will never be complete.

### Principles

Principle-based approaches will underpin all of FGS's actions. Four key principles are:

1. Respect: “Nothing About Us Without Us”
2. Equity: for admission and for progress to graduation
  1. Build on existing models, expand their scope and add new equity elements
3. Responsibility to address historic disadvantages
4. Partnerships with internal and external key stakeholders and stakeholder groups

### Definitions

Mi'kmaq or African Nova Scotian students are those who self-identify on application to graduate study at Dalhousie. In some cases, Mi'kmaq or African Nova Scotian communities may choose to confirm eligibility. Protocols for this will be developed in consultation with:

- Director of Indigenous Community Engagement (Catherine Martin)
- Director of African Nova Scotian Community Engagement (forthcoming)
- Indigenous Advisory Council and Dalhousie Elders-in-Residence
- African Nova Scotian Strategy Working Group and Advisory Council

### Goals Underpinning Action Plan

1. To create and support pathways into and through graduate study at Dalhousie.
2. To take action on barriers that are at least partially within FGS control, including financial constraints and lack of visible role models.
3. To support and develop new scholars and future faculty colleagues for Nova Scotia and beyond.
4. To continue learning from Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian colleagues and students.

### Contexts

Dalhousie has commissioned, or been presented with, a number of reports during at least the past decade. Some of the recommendations within these reports have been implemented, some are being considered, and some have not yet been discussed in any meaningful way. We need to take action. FGS is committed to the provision of equitable access to all equity-seeking

groups including Indigenous students and Black students. Importantly, some of the reports, listed in the Bibliography, collectively make a strong case for an initial focus on the historic communities most closely related to the land on which Dalhousie University sits:

1. Mi'kmaq students from any First Nations community in Mi'kma'ki
2. African Nova Scotian students from any historic Black community in Nova Scotia

This document represents the first version of an action plan for Dalhousie's Faculty of Graduate Studies. The suggested actions, stemming as they do from so many prior reports and discussions, have already been endorsed by FGS Faculty Council through the following two motions (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020):

1. "FGS Council endorses the goals for Access and Success for Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian Graduate Students" (Motion carried)
2. "FGS Council requires an annual report from the Dean on progress towards the goals for Access and Success for Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian Graduate Students" (Motion carried)

In addition, Dalhousie has several programs regarding access and success that are well-established and successful. This document is informed by them.

#### Student Access and Success in Institutional Context

A component of Dalhousie's strategic planning efforts for equity, diversity and inclusion (2015-2019 in particular) were predicated on the model presented by Professor Dylan Smith in her volume *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making it Work* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Dr Smith conceptualizes how universities can institutionalize diversity as illustrated through the four necessarily interdependent pillars illustrated here:



#### FGS Authority and Limitation

The Faculty of Graduate Studies has thousands of students, all of whom are impacted by the Faculty's regulations, policies and procedures, and none of whom study within FGS itself. FGS leaders control internal processes and can amend them. For strategic and regulatory changes,

FGS leaders are key “influencers” and work with guidance and support from Faculty Council, line Faculties and Senate.

FGS regulates:

- Senate-approved admissions requirements and standards
- Senate-approved degree requirements
- Progression requirements and timelines

FGS manages:

- Processes for numerous graduate scholarships and stipend payments

FGS controls, with some limitations:

- Decisions and selection of scholarship winners

FGS may propose:

- New or amended admissions procedures or categories
- New regulations relating to full-time and part-time study
- Additional FGS membership categories

FGS is limited in its actions regarding aspects of accredited programs

Contexts across Canada

Members of the U15, and other Dalhousie-comparator institutions offer a range of programming developed, in some cases, over decades of outreach. This document is informed by them, whilst recognizing that there are no “quick fixes.” We need to build on the trust we already have in some communities, and work respectfully to develop it within others.

## Partnerships

FGS has strong connections across the institution on which to build in order to ensure that actions will be taken in a timely manner. In some instances, FGS may legitimately act unilaterally. In most instances, partnerships are essential in order to make progress. Key partners, both internal and external, include:

Within Dalhousie:

- Indigenous Advisory Council
- African Nova Scotian Advisory Council
- Deans
- Graduate program leaders and coordinators
- Dalhousie Libraries
- The Centre for Learning and Teaching
- Student Affairs

Outwith Dalhousie:

1. Indigenous Communities throughout Mi'kma'ki
2. Historic African Nova Scotian Communities
3. PSE institutions in Nova Scotia and Mi'kma'ki
4. Black educational associations in Nova Scotia
5. Mi'kmaq educational associations across Mi'kma'ki
6. Labour and Advanced Education, Nova Scotia Government

## Action Plan: FGS Governance

The Dean will propose an amendment to the Terms of Reference for FGS Council to include 2 additional designated representatives: one Indigenous colleague (preferably Mi'kmaq); one Black colleague (preferably African Nova Scotian). This will not preclude other Indigenous and Black colleagues serving as regular Faculty representatives. The goal is to facilitate a stronger voice for Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian perspectives and needs during Council discussions and decision-making. In the shorter term, FGS recognizes that, at present, there are very limited numbers of Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian colleagues who might serve in this capacity. FGS also recognizes the imperative to support the success of these colleagues and, thus, not to overburden pre-tenure colleagues with administrative work. Therefore, in the shorter term, whilst these new Council positions will exist, they may not be filled immediately. This governance plan will contribute to the goal of ensuring that Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian colleagues and students are fully involved in the discussions and debates around access and success.

## Action Plan: Access

### Affirmative Admissions

FGS will provide leadership to propose affirmative action for admissions policies and regulations:

- The waiving of application fees for all self-identified Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian students applying to all programs overseen by FGS
- The waiving of international differential fees for Mi'kmaq students from Maine
- The removal of some standardized tests for self-identified students, acknowledging any limitations related to accreditation
- The broader application of Prior Learning Assessment protocols for admission to graduate study
- The use of designated "seats" in some programs
- The editing of sections of the FGS website application information to ensure that step-by-step guidance is sufficiently clear to enable confident understanding of the processes for first in family applicants
- The training of both FGS and program-level admissions colleagues concerning the meaning of, and methods to achieve, equitable access to graduate studies

## Part-time Study

Recognizing that many doctoral students in Canada are, in fact, engaged in part-time study, and recognizing that this may be especially true for historically underrepresented populations, FGS will work with doctoral programs to propose to Senate the official approval of:

- Part-time doctoral study at Dalhousie

## Scholarships

Insofar as FGS has control over the following, it will:

- Remove “Full-time status” being required for scholarship and other financial applications at both the Masters and Doctoral levels
- Remove 3.7 being the minimum GPA requirement for scholarships
- Send instructions for applying for funding to all self-identified applicants for graduate study
- Develop additional designated scholarships, using existing and future internal and provincial funding. With leadership and advice from Indigenous and African Nova Scotian colleagues, these should be named to honour Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian individuals
- Permit in-course applications for scholarships where possible
- Develop promise scholarships (see below)

## Pathways

Working with internal Dalhousie partners, FGS will consider the viability and structure for a “bridging program” offering tailored mentorship for senior UG students planning to apply for graduate study at Dalhousie or elsewhere.

Learning from the model of the Imhotep Legacy Academy, and working with Advancement colleagues on appropriate funding, FGS will lead the development of “promise scholarships” for senior Dalhousie undergraduate students from these two populations, especially those who are “first in family.” Ideally, in the longer term and depending on funding availability, a proportion of such scholarships will be tenable for any graduate program offered by a Nova Scotian university.

Working with faculty colleagues and with guidance from the Centre for Learning and Teaching, FGS will propose and support:

- Methods for supervisory outreach to self-identified senior UG students

Working with Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian stakeholders, FGS Communications colleagues will develop communication and recruitment materials for the FGS website, including:

- With guidance from Mi’kmaq speakers, at least one section in the Mi’kmaq language
- Feature profiles of Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian graduate students
- Information about the promise scholarship program both for potential undergraduate applicants and for potential donors

## Action Plan: Support for Success

### Program Structures

FGS will propose for Masters/Doctoral Supervisory Committee membership:

- Additional Adjunct categories: Adjunct (Elder); Adjunct (Community Member) to facilitate respectful research engagement with communities

FGS and the Centre for Learning and Teaching will support programs to:

- Provide teaching/curriculum guidance for graduate faculty
- Introduce a teaching/research small-grant program for faculty to mentor and fund senior UG students on research projects

FGS will work with Faculties, and Advancement to:

- Develop additional work / research placements for designated students, including in communities, and with guidance from the Black Business Initiative and Ulnooweg and other appropriate organizations

### Student Supports

In partnership with Student Affairs, and acknowledging the need for fundraising first, FGS will:

- Support the addition of two positions, “Student Advisor (Graduate Studies)”, one African Nova Scotian for the Black Student Advising Centre and one Mi’kmaq for the Indigenous Student Centre.
- Introduce SAGE [“Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement”] to Dalhousie for Indigenous graduate students’ peer mentorship
- Develop an equivalent to SAGE for African Nova Scotian graduate students

FGS will provide leadership to propose and support:

- Focused professional development, identified as beneficial by community members internal and external to Dalhousie, for Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian graduate students
- This professional development will include mentoring and guidance for students in order to encourage career paths into the professoriate, as well as other career paths

### Defining and Measuring Progress

The Faculty of Graduate Studies will not define what “effective progress” means. Any progress must be meaningful to Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities.

FGS will be held accountable for evidence-based annual reporting to Faculty Council. FGS will therefore maintain data and information to make clear the iterative changes, year by year, towards the collaboratively agreed-upon longer-term goals. In addition, FGS will provide their annual report to the Vice-Provost Equity and Inclusion and to the Chairs of the Indigenous Advisory Council and the African Nova Scotian Strategy Group and Advisory Council.

## Funding Sources and Guidance

FGS will lead discussions with key internal colleagues including those who constitute the membership of the President's Executive.

Agencies and government departments, regarding possible sources of funding for scholarships and other aids for equitable access and success, include:

- Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
- Nova Scotia Government [especially relevant for province-wide approach to graduate study access and success for these two groups of students]
- The Tri-agencies [especially relevant for research funding opportunities requiring equity and diversity elements, including outreach plans to attract diverse students to funded research projects]

## Immediate Next Steps

This Action Plan will be shared with the generous colleagues and students who have informed its development, either during the 2019-20 academic year, or over previous years' discussions about equity and inclusion.

These colleagues and students are invited to contact Dean Leonard ([Marty.Leonard@dal.ca](mailto:Marty.Leonard@dal.ca)) with input about further strategies that should be included in future Action Plans. We recognize that this Action Plan is a first step.

## Bibliography

*FGS welcomes recommendations of additional reports and memoranda that may help inform and enhance actions.*

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