



Report on the Impacts of Graduate Studies at BCIT (Summary Version)
BCIT Faculty & Staff Association

To: Paul McCullough, Acting President, BCIT; Tom Roemer, VP Academic, BCIT; Kim Dotto, Dean of Research, BCIT

Copied: Departments and FSA members in research; BCIT leadership; related managers

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OVERVIEW

Enclosed is a summary of BCITFSA's "Report on the Impacts of Graduate Studies at BCIT." Conducted in 2020 and 2021, the "Report" finds that BCIT faculty members working in graduate studies do not receive the support necessary to sustain their work and face serious challenges unique to their role at the Institute. Problems stem from the policies and practices of both province and Institute, creating workload and morale issues that undermine teaching and learning conditions.

BACKGROUND

BCIT offered four master's degree programs and five graduate certificates across three Schools/Divisions at the time of this study, with more planned. The development of graduate programs and certificates is, however, taking place within a provincial framework that does not officially recognize BCIT as a research institution. The province requires a research component in the approval process for most graduate programs while paradoxically contending that such research does not occur at BCIT. Our members working in graduate studies are therefore placed in a difficult situation: the province approves graduate programs without providing for the research infrastructure needed for their survival.

While some issues clearly lie outside the Institute's control, BCIT has been slow to address the challenges it has the power to confront. Although the province has refused efforts by the Institute and FSA to gain recognition for our faculty's research, the Institute can otherwise support graduate-studies education and instructors.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The lack of viable workload and delivery frameworks has made graduate-studies education at BCIT unsustainable. The thread running between these two issues is a failure to cultivate distinct institutional frameworks. Grafting graduate teaching upon the existing undergraduate and Part-Time Studies models, as the Institute has done, instead creates untenable workloads for faculty. The current contact-hours model, for example, does not properly capture mandatory activities such as thesis supervision, research and publishing,

and the development of graduate courses. Our members are delivering a tremendous amount of unpaid work as a result. Supports that may be unique to BCIT are therefore required to deliver graduate education, including improved access to learning spaces, funding opportunities for students and faculty, and graduate-specific Departments. The Institute could recognize graduate-level courses and programs by amending existing teaching, administrative, funding, and student support frameworks to account for the fundamentally different nature of graduate-level teaching and supervision.

CONCLUSIONS

The summary below captures a growing frustration among FSA members. There is a significant gap between the advertising of BCIT's provincially and nationally competitive graduate programs and the realities of their delivery. As BCIT moves forward with the approval of more graduate programs, the FSA believes that problems for our members in graduate studies have come to a head. It is past time for the Institute to decide whether it wants to allocate sufficient resources to graduate studies.

The "Report on the Impacts of Graduate Studies at BCIT" is a call for change. The FSA stands ready to work with the Institute to develop the creative, collaborative, and sustainable solutions required to address the issues it raises.

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BCITFSA Report on the Impacts of Graduate Studies at BCIT (Summary)

Overview

In July 2021, BCITFSA produced the "Report on the Impacts of Graduate Studies at BCIT." The original report was developed for, and generated by, a survey and event organized by members of the FSA's Caucus on Applied Research & Advanced Studies (CARAS). The audience for the original was the FSA membership, while this summary is intended for the broader BCIT community.

Some sections of this summary mirror content in the original report and some are condensed.

The Future of Graduate Studies at BCIT

BCIT benefits from the prestige, learning opportunities, and funding that comes from graduate studies programs. Unfortunately, there is a significant lack of substantial institutional support offered in this arena.

Some of this can be attributed to constraints put in place by the provincial government, but there exist issues within the power of BCIT to change. It is incumbent upon BCIT to ensure the success of current and future graduate studies programs and this, of specific concern to the BCITFSA, includes fair, reasonable, and adequate working conditions for our members involved in the delivery and support of the graduate programs.

At the time of this report, there are a number of issues including ones related to workload, learning infrastructure and resources, and student supports. We are producing this report to honour the work of our members, to build awareness across the membership, and to identify concrete and real concerns that BCIT should resolve for the benefit of FSA members, students, and the Institute itself.

We hope all of the concerns raised by members will be addressed. In particular, we draw attention to two themes that are emblematic of the critical need for change in how graduate studies are approached at BCIT:

- A viable program delivery model is needed to sustain graduate studies and to avoid violating members' collective agreement rights: for example, a three-term model for delivery can only be used if sufficient faculty FTE's and resources are provided to avoid denying members their break and vacation entitlements.
- A viable workloading model is needed to make graduate studies sustainable in the long term and to recognize the full scope of our members' work. For example, the typical notion of contact hours for faculty, along with corresponding HR and course administration systems such as Banner, does not fully account for the mandatory activities of graduate studies faculty (such as ongoing thesis/project supervision, research, publishing, development of new graduate-level courses, mandatory reporting to the Ministry, etc.), nor are appropriate job descriptions created and applied to account for the full scope of faculty activities within a sustainable workload model.

Questions We Considered

Through a survey and subsequent online event, we explored the following questions:

- What are the concerns about working conditions (e.g. workload, publishing requirements, release time, etc.) for FSA members working in grad-level or research oriented programs?
- What are the unique issues with respect to facilities and equipment for grad-level or research oriented programs?
- What student supports are lacking at BCIT for students in grad-level or research oriented programs?

Context

At the time of the original report, BCIT offered four master's degree programs and five graduate certificates across three Schools/Divisions. An additional Masters in Engineering in Smart Grid Systems and Technologies and a Graduate Certificate in Global Leadership were under development as of that date. All of this is taking place within a provincial context that does not officially recognize BCIT as a research institution. The FSA has previously entered into negotiations and advocacy with both BCIT and the provincial government to rectify many of the concerns raised in this report. Unfortunately, the provincial government refused to allow BCIT to engage in meaningful negotiations to recognize the role of research at the Institute.

Background & Historical Issues

Information from Departments who have been offering graduate programs the longest at BCIT provides important background on some of the most pressing issues, and this background and ongoing issues are what prompted us to hold an event.

BCIT implemented graduate-level courses and graduate programs into the existing teaching, workloading, administrative, contractual, facilities, funding, and student support frameworks that were *built to deliver diploma level undergraduate courses and programs* — without making any changes to these systems and frameworks to account for the different demands of graduate-level teaching and supervision, including its symbiotic relationship with research.

The decision to fit graduate-level teaching, supervision, and research enterprise within an undergraduate framework mainly dedicated to delivering diplomas has created significant issues for the working conditions of our members. We attempt to summarize some of these issues in the following section.

Summary: Impacts of Graduate Studies Programs at BCIT

This content summarizes the input from FSA members from the survey and event. Members provided a variety of specific examples and scenarios regarding their concerns. The sections below are a condensed, high-level summary.

Q1: What are the concerns about working conditions (e.g. workload, publishing requirements, etc.) for FSA members working in grad-level programs?

- A need for better support from the entire BCIT community for addressing the needs of members that work in graduate studies.

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- A need to foster and support a culture of graduate-level teaching and supervision and acknowledge its symbiotic relationship with research.
- Contractual working conditions that contemplate the true nature of this work, including solving the discrepancy between compensation mechanisms and the ability to properly account for the hours involved.
- Properly workload research and development, student supervision, scholarly activities (e.g. individual faculty research/publication, etc.), as well as provide time to apply for the expected funding opportunities. Work done in support of graduate programs should be recognized as contact hours under the collective agreement.
- The existing calendar of teaching and non-teaching time, along with break periods, does not match the reality of graduate-level studies.
- A lack of infrastructure and structural resources specific to graduate-level studies and research.
- Lack of sufficient funding for equipment, travel, etc.
- A clear connection between development of graduate-level studies and BCIT's "applied" and industry driven approaches is needed.
- A better understanding of needs from BCIT's "business" departments (e.g. Marcom, finance, facilities and campus development, timetabling, etc.)
- A lack of clarity around differences between needs for master's degrees vs. graduate certificates and the understanding of operational realities by APQA, EdCo, and BOG.

Q2: What are the unique issues with respect to facilities and equipment for grad-level programs?

- Equipment (hardware and software) and facilities do not match curricular and pedagogical needs and there is a lack of support for ongoing maintenance of equipment and spaces.
- There is a lack of availability of adequate and appropriate spaces as well as a lack of opportunity to utilize campus facilities as "living labs".
- The funding model is too reliant on individual faculty members.
- There should be a cross-departmental approach to ensure efficient utilization of equipment, lab facilities, and to support the interdisciplinary nature of graduate work.

Q3: What supports are needed for students to succeed in grad-level programs?

- A School of Graduate Studies could ensure that graduate-level programs match up with the applied nature of BCIT's overall purposes for student learning and provide a scholarship/funding structure.
- Graduate students could also be supported through a social and networking structure such as a Grad Student Society.
- Additional supports could be provided including, but not limited to, library collections, graduate-level writing supports, peer review program, databases and research supports, showcasing graduate work, connections to industry partners, dedicated work spaces, etc.
- Graduate students are lacking opportunity to work as TAs or markers – excellent methods to support research interests, great line items on CV for future schooling. Potential future negotiations around the FSA Student Employee category to match the potential for work as a graduate student (e.g. TA, etc.).