

CANADIAN GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2013

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

PREPARED BY THE UNIVERSITY PLANNING OFFICE



RYERSON
UNIVERSITY

Everyone Makes a Mark

Introduction

The Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) was conducted for the third time at Ryerson in 2013. All Ontario universities offering graduate programs have participated in the survey on a triennial basis beginning in 2007. Results allow one to assess Ryerson's progress in the provision of a high quality graduate student experience.

All graduate students at Ryerson were invited by email to participate in the online survey. A total of 2,349 students were contacted, and 975 responded, yielding a response rate of 42 percent. Among Ryerson's respondents, 762 students (78 percent) were enrolled in master's programs, and 213 students (22 percent) were enrolled in doctoral programs.¹

General Satisfaction with the Ryerson Graduate Experience

A number of survey items ask students to provide a general assessment of their experience at Ryerson. Results, summarized in Figures 1 and 2, are roughly similar to those at other Ontario universities.

Overall, 86 percent of students report that their academic experience at Ryerson is "good," "very good" or "excellent." About 80 percent of students report that if they were to start their graduate/professional career again, they would "probably" or "definitely" select the same field of study, and would "probably" or "definitely" select the same faculty supervisor.

About two-thirds of Ryerson students would "probably" or "definitely" select the same university if they were to start their graduate/professional career again, and 72 percent would recommend the University to someone considering the same program. Master's students are more positive than doctoral students in this regard.

Assessment of Faculty

Respondents' assessments of the faculty members in their program are very favourable. The vast majority of respondents (91 percent) rate the intellectual quality of faculty as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Between 82 and 87 percent of Ryerson respondents express satisfaction with faculty teaching and the relationship between faculty and graduate students. Master's students provide more positive ratings on these items than do doctoral respondents. Results are summarized in Figure 3.

Thirteen questions regarding students' dissertation advisors were posed. Reported satisfaction is high for all items. The percentage of doctoral students providing a favourable assessment of a given item ranges from 82 to 91 percent.

¹ Results are estimated to be accurate within 2.4 percentage points 19 times out of 20 for all respondents combined. For the group of master's program respondents, results are estimated to be accurate within 2.8 percentage points and for the doctoral group, 6.2 percentage points. (Sample size and response rate are taken into account when estimating the magnitude of error.)

Figure 1: Overall Assessment of Graduate Experience

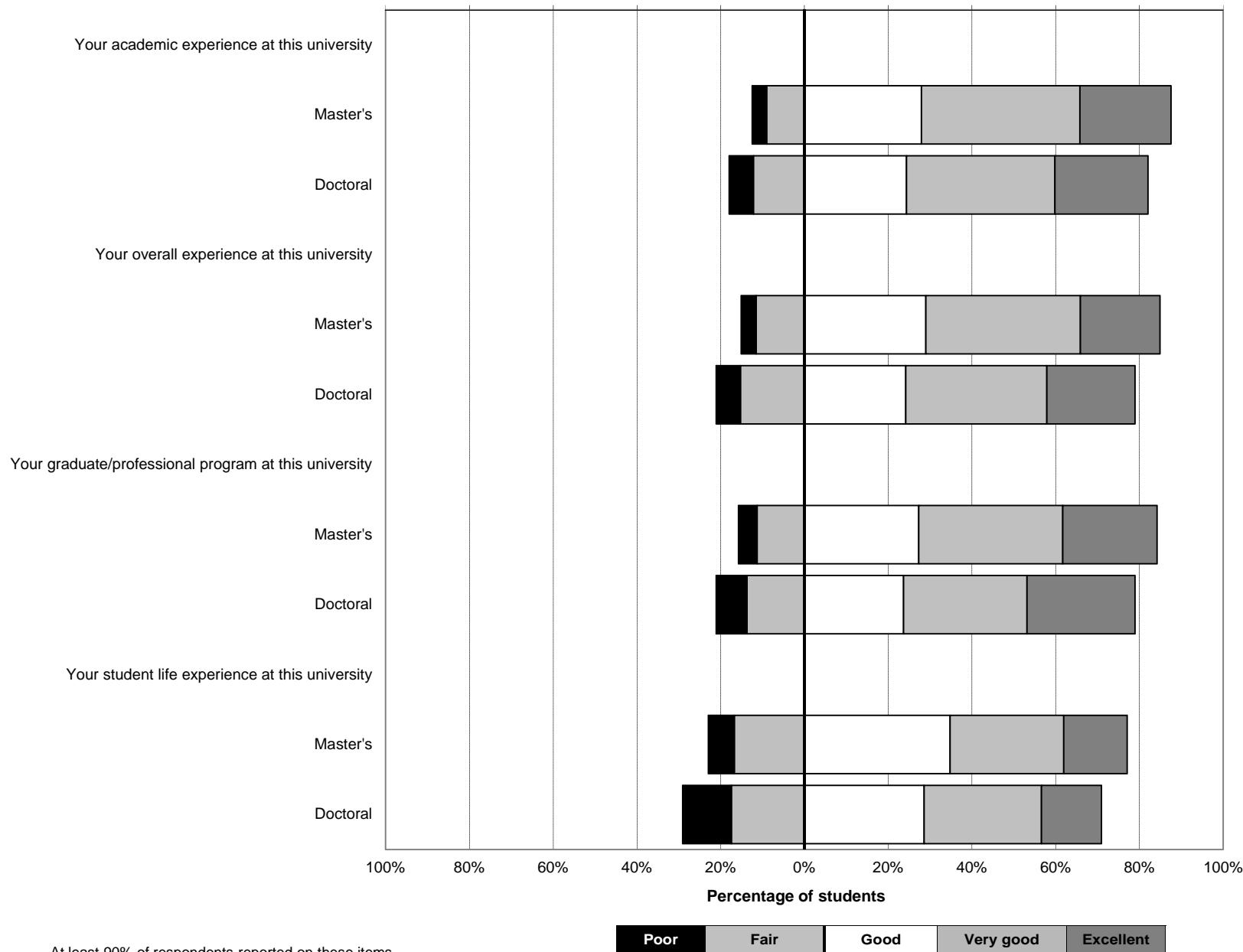
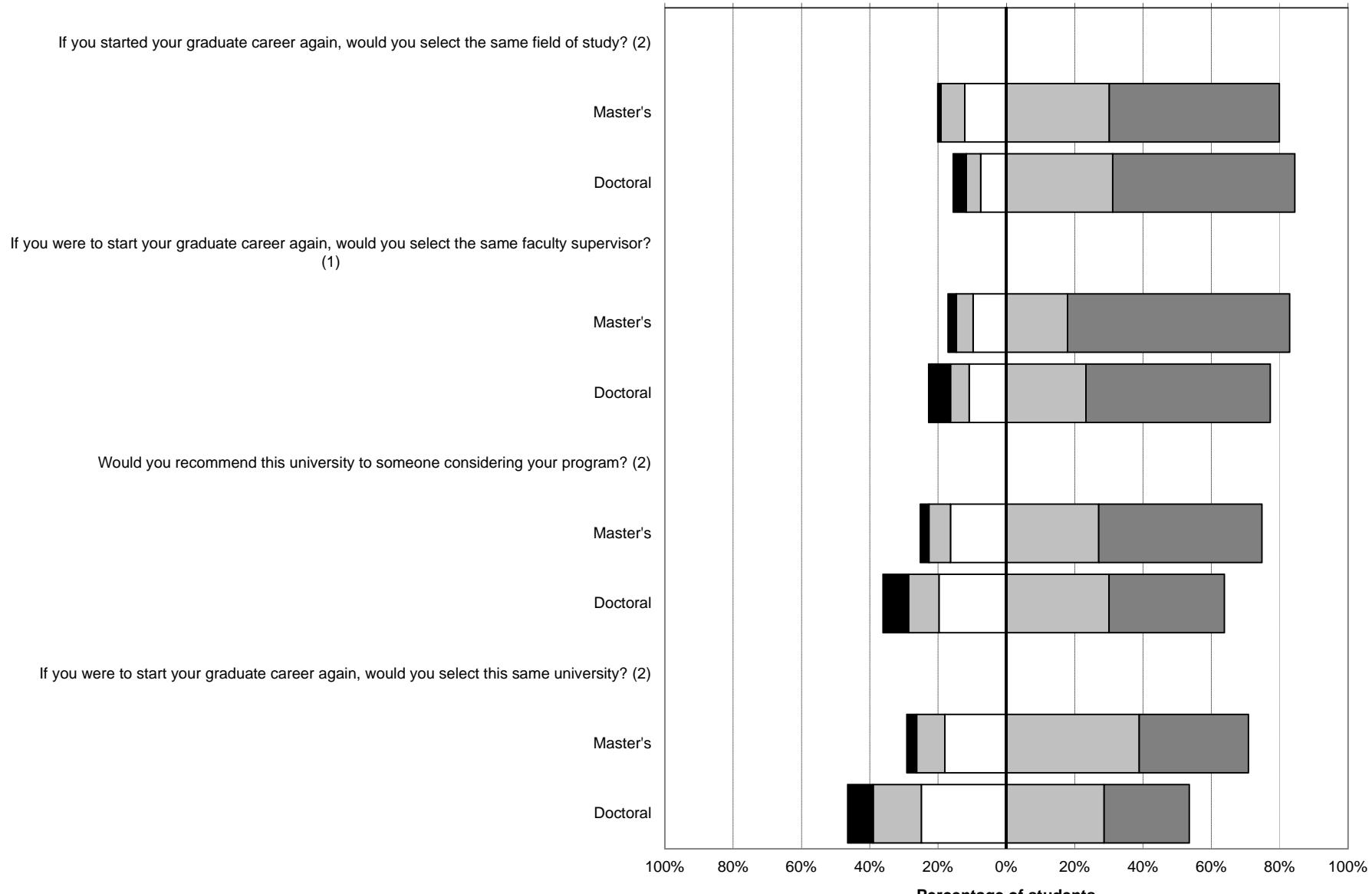


Figure 2: General Satisfaction with Program

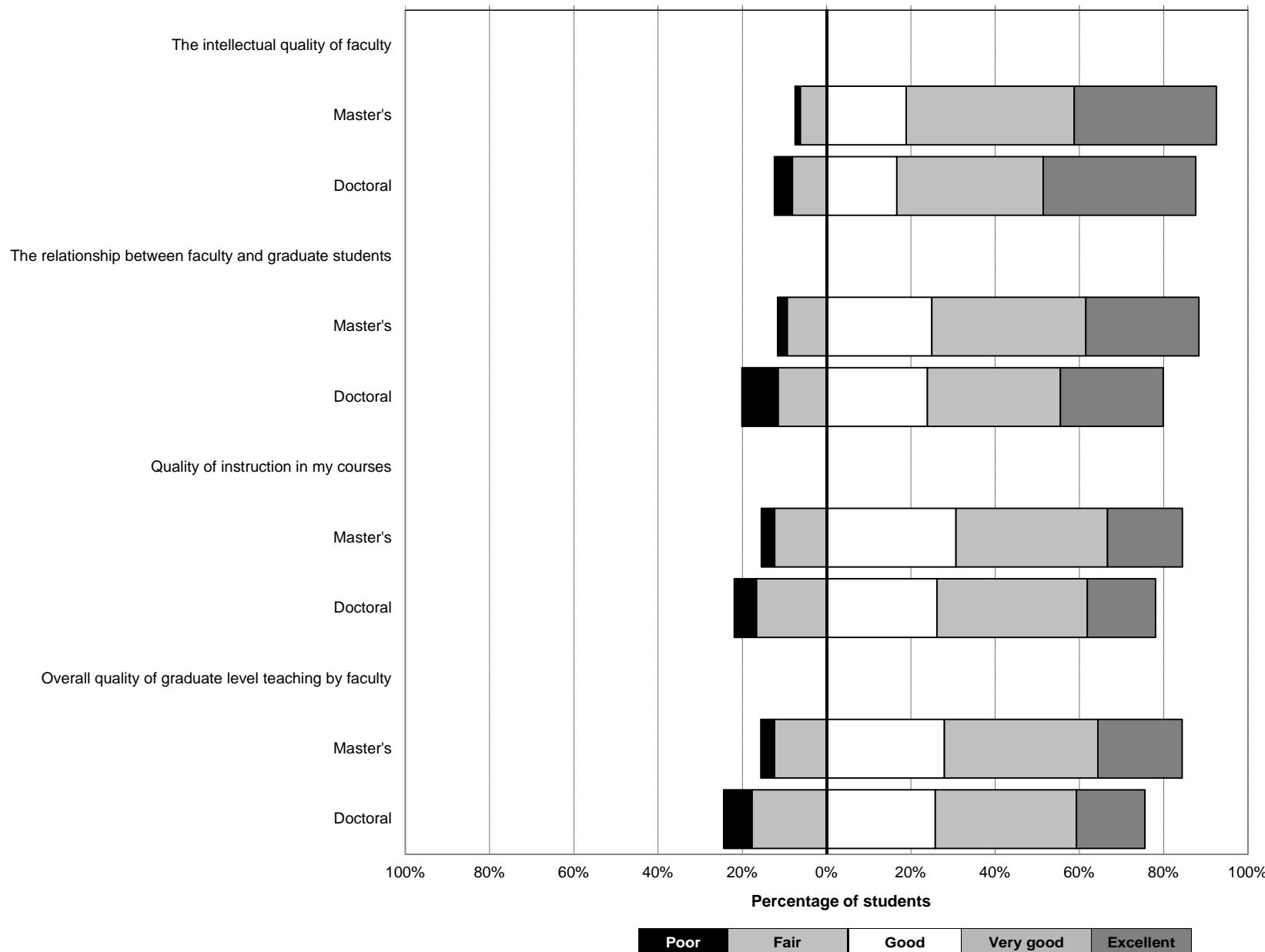


(1) Not asked of professional master's. 88% of respondents reported on this item

(2) At least 99% of respondents reported on these items

Definitely not	Probably not	Maybe	Probably	Definitely
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Figure 3: Assessment of Faculty



The vast majority of students (over 90 percent) agree that their dissertation advisors are available for regular meetings and indicate that advisors are helpful in selecting a dissertation topic. Similarly, almost 90 percent of doctoral students indicate that advisors provide constructive feedback, return their work promptly, are helpful in writing the dissertation proposal, promote their professional development and serve as their advocate when necessary. Other aspects of dissertation advisors' roles also receive high ratings. Results are summarized in Figure 4.

Student satisfaction with doctoral dissertation advisors at Ryerson is at least as positive as that among other Ontario universities, with results at Ryerson being similar to, and in some cases, higher than the Ontario average.

Assessment of Academic Program

Students were asked to rate specific aspects of their program of study, including the amount of coursework, opportunities for student collaboration and the relationship of program content to their research/professional goals. Results are summarized in Figure 5.

88 percent of respondents indicate that the intellectual quality of their fellow students is "good," "very good" or "excellent." Similarly, 83 percent indicate that the amount of coursework in their programs is appropriate, and that opportunities for student collaboration and teamwork are "good," "very good" or "excellent."

82 percent of master's students and 75 percent at the doctoral level report that the relationship of program content to their research or professional goals is "good" or better. Results at the Ontario level are similar to those at Ryerson.

About 70 percent of Ryerson students describe the availability of courses needed to complete one's program as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Responses on this item have improved over past rounds of the survey at the doctoral level, although they are still somewhat below the Ontario doctoral average.

Doctoral students at Ryerson tend to be more positive than master's students in their rating of opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary work and to take courses outside of one's home department. About 71 percent of doctoral students rate opportunities in each of these areas as "good," "very good" or "excellent." These are rated positively by 63 to 66 percent of master's students.

Assessment of Academic and Other Support

85 percent of respondents indicate that the level of help provided by staff members in their program is "good," "very good" or "excellent." 75 percent report similarly on the quality of academic advising and guidance. Fewer students (58 percent) report satisfaction with advice on the availability of financial support. Results in all three areas of academic advising are comparable to the Ontario average.

Figure 4: Dissertation Advisors, Doctoral Students' Assessment

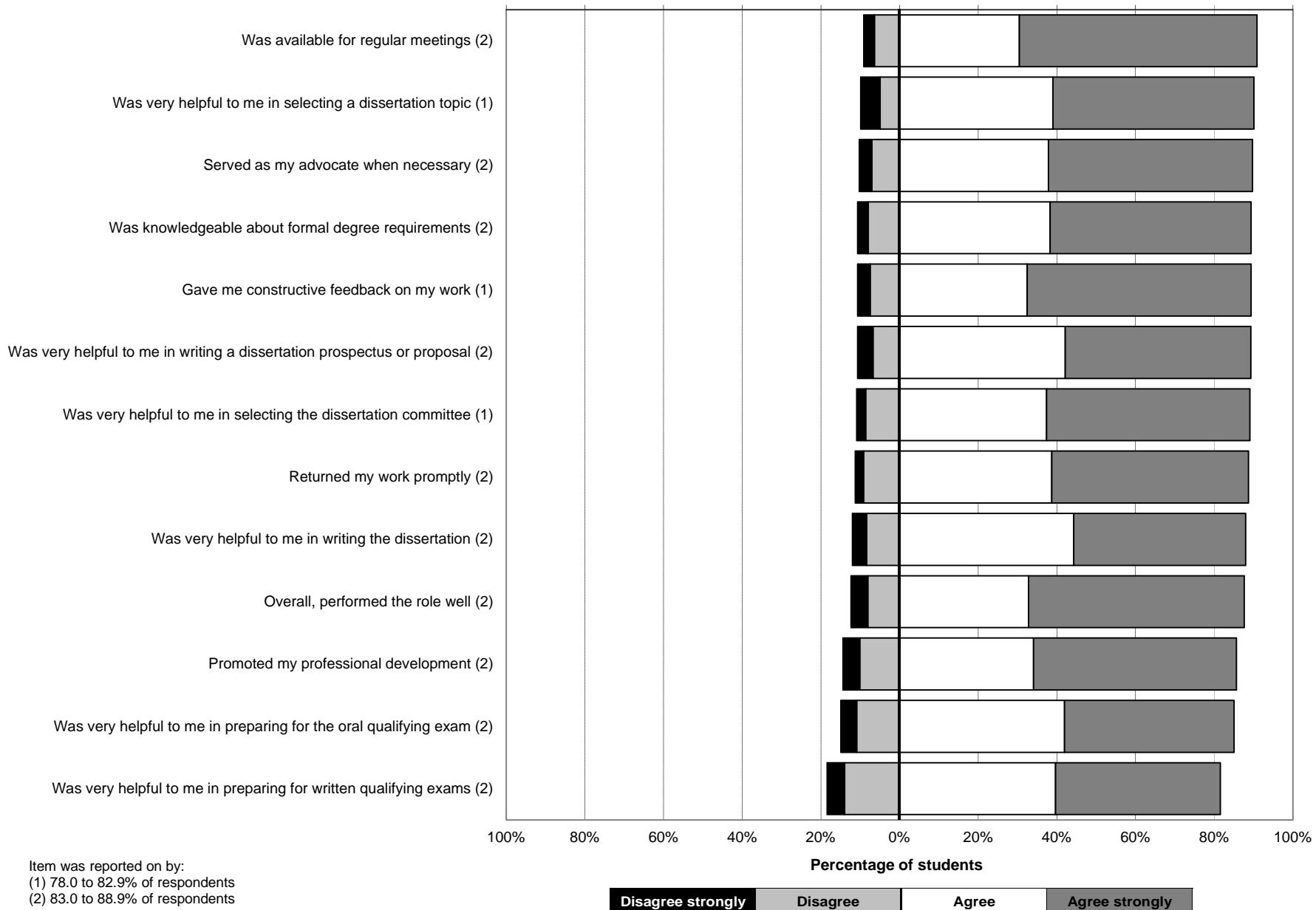
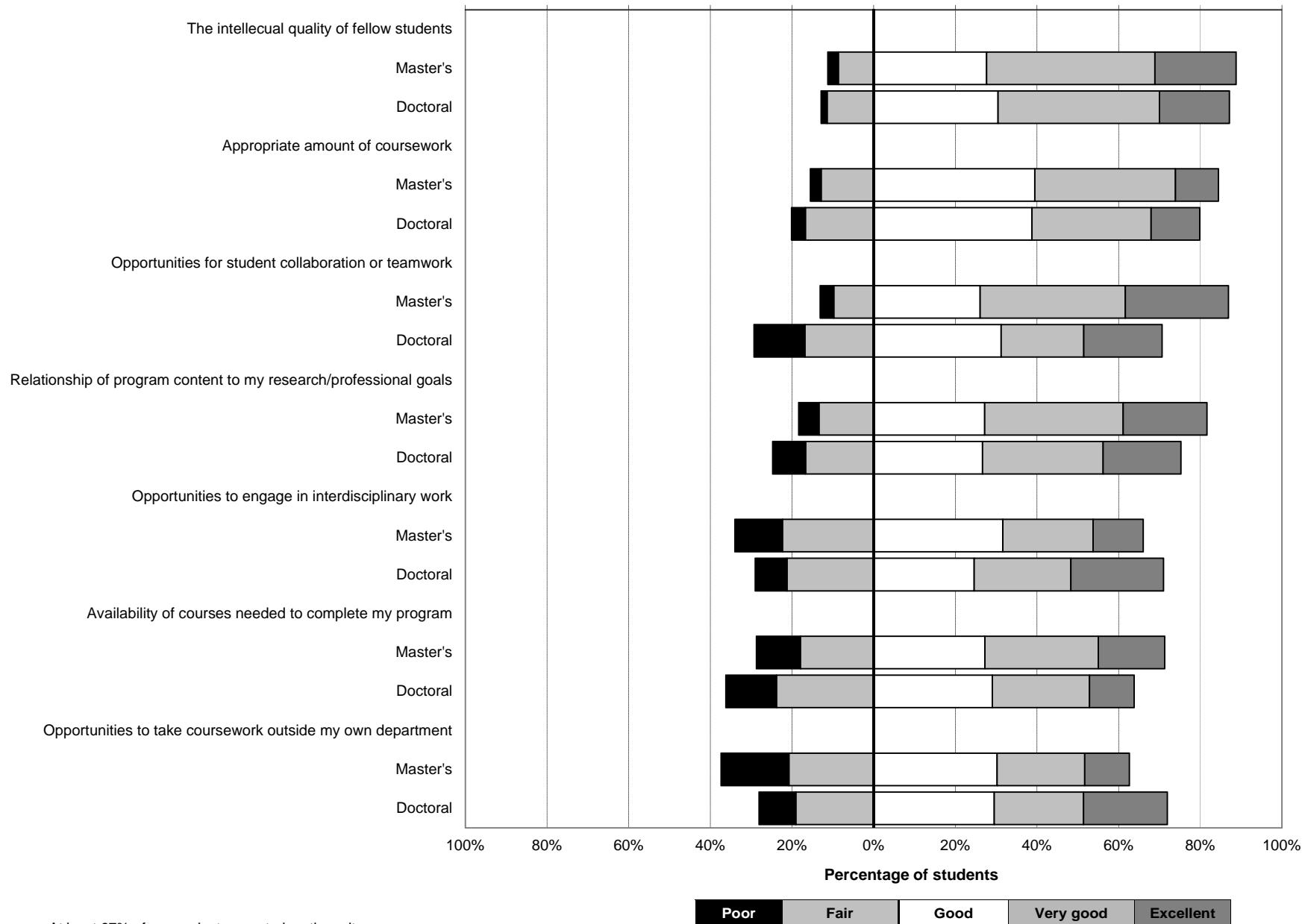


Figure 5: Assessment of Program



At least 97% of respondents reported on these items.

Applied Skills Development

The survey includes a series of questions relating to support or opportunities for the development of applied and professional skills, including teaching, publishing and writing grant proposals, as well as preparation for professional practice. For the purposes of this report, questions are divided into three categories – those that pertain to both doctoral students and master's students in research-based programs, those that are relevant mainly to doctoral students, and questions for master's students in professional programs.

Applied skills for research-focused master's and doctoral programs:

Students are most satisfied with courses, workshops, and orientation on teaching, which are characterized as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” by 80 percent of respondents. Similarly, 77 percent indicate satisfaction with feedback on their research.

Students are least satisfied with career-related advice or workshops. About half describe advice/workshops on research positions, career options within academia, as well as careers outside academia, as “good,” “very good” or “excellent.” Results are summarized in Figure 6a.

For all items in this area, Ryerson's results are comparable to, or slightly higher than, those at other Ontario universities.

Applied skills in doctoral programs:

Support or opportunities for conducting independent research, collaborating with faculty on research, as well as the provision of faculty guidance on formulating a research topic receive generally positive assessments from doctoral students at Ryerson. These are described as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” by 73 to 79 percent of respondents. Less positive are the ratings of advice/workshops on preparing for candidacy exams (52 percent of respondents express satisfaction in this area) and writing grant proposals (56 percent). Results are summarized in Figure 6b.

Applied skills in professionally-based master's programs:

Over 70 percent of students in professionally-based master's programs report that opportunities for contact (e.g., lectures, seminars, discussion) with practicing professionals are “good,” “very good” or “excellent.” Similar results are reported for advice or workshops on professional writing standards.

69 percent express satisfaction with advice or workshops on professional ethics. Fewer students (under 60 percent) report similarly with respect to advice on job preparation and professional practice. Results, which tend to be lower than the Ontario average, are summarized in Figure 6c.

Figure 6a: Applied/Research Skills, rating of support/training

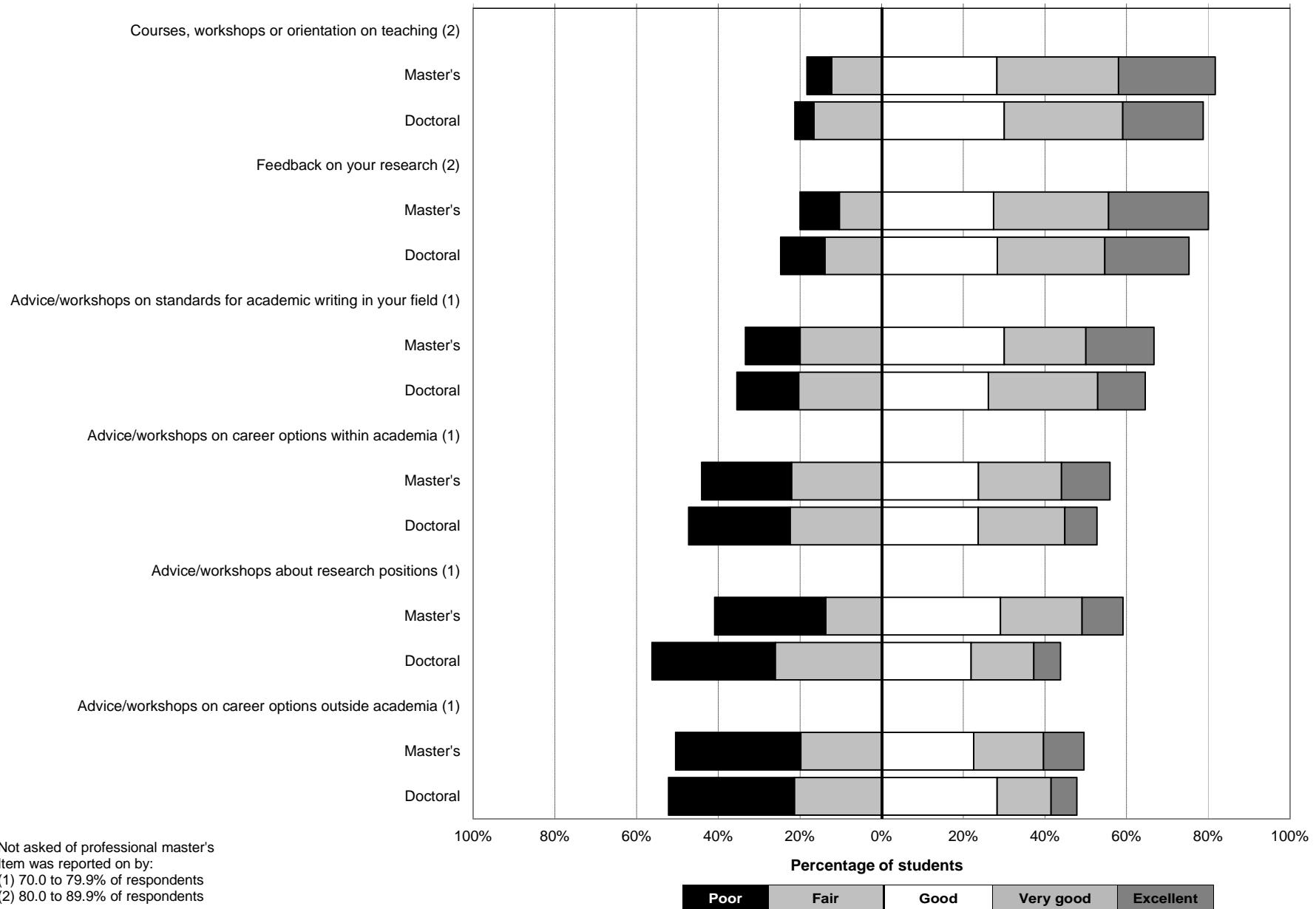


Figure 6b: Research skills for doctoral students, rating of support received or opportunities provided

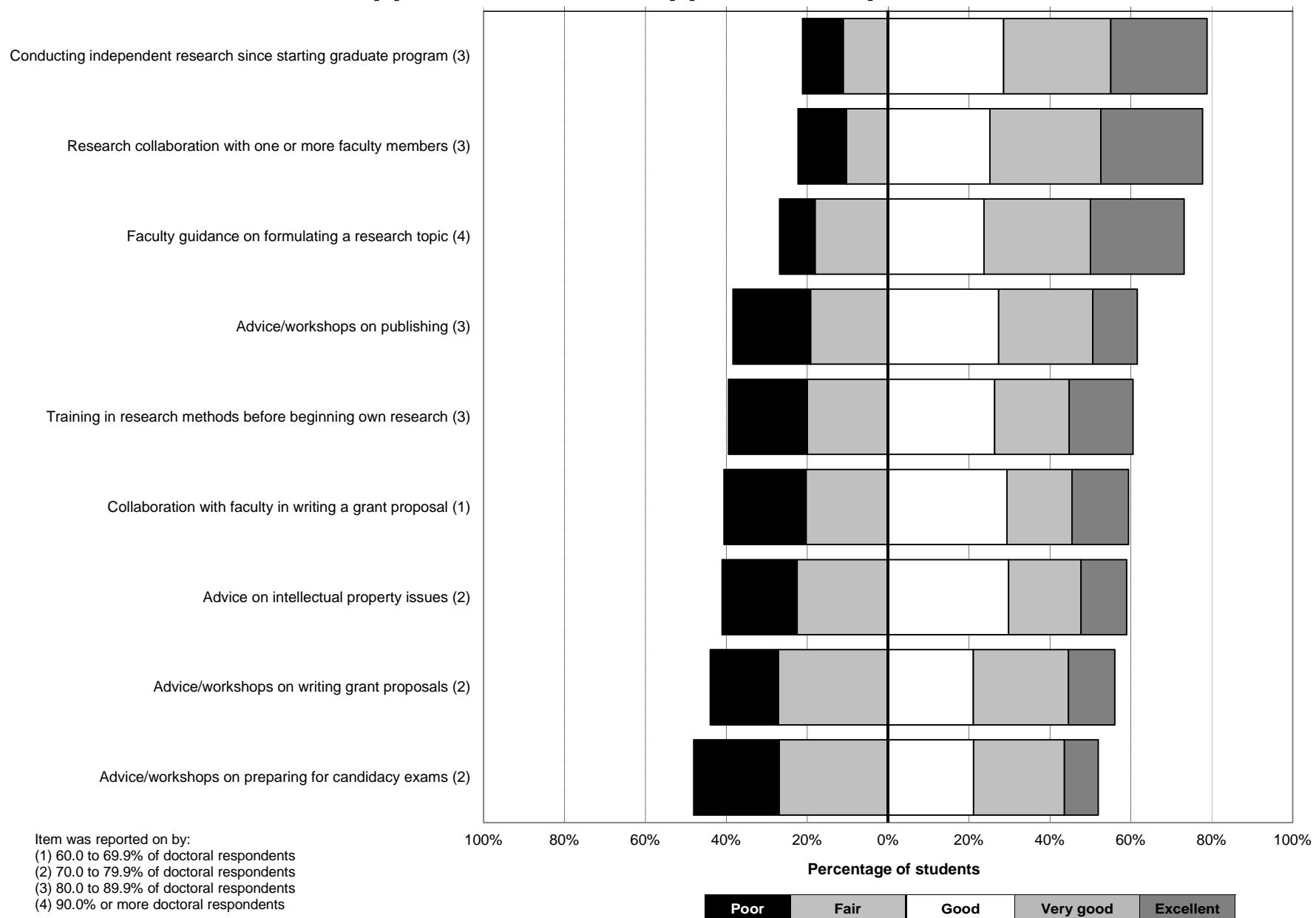
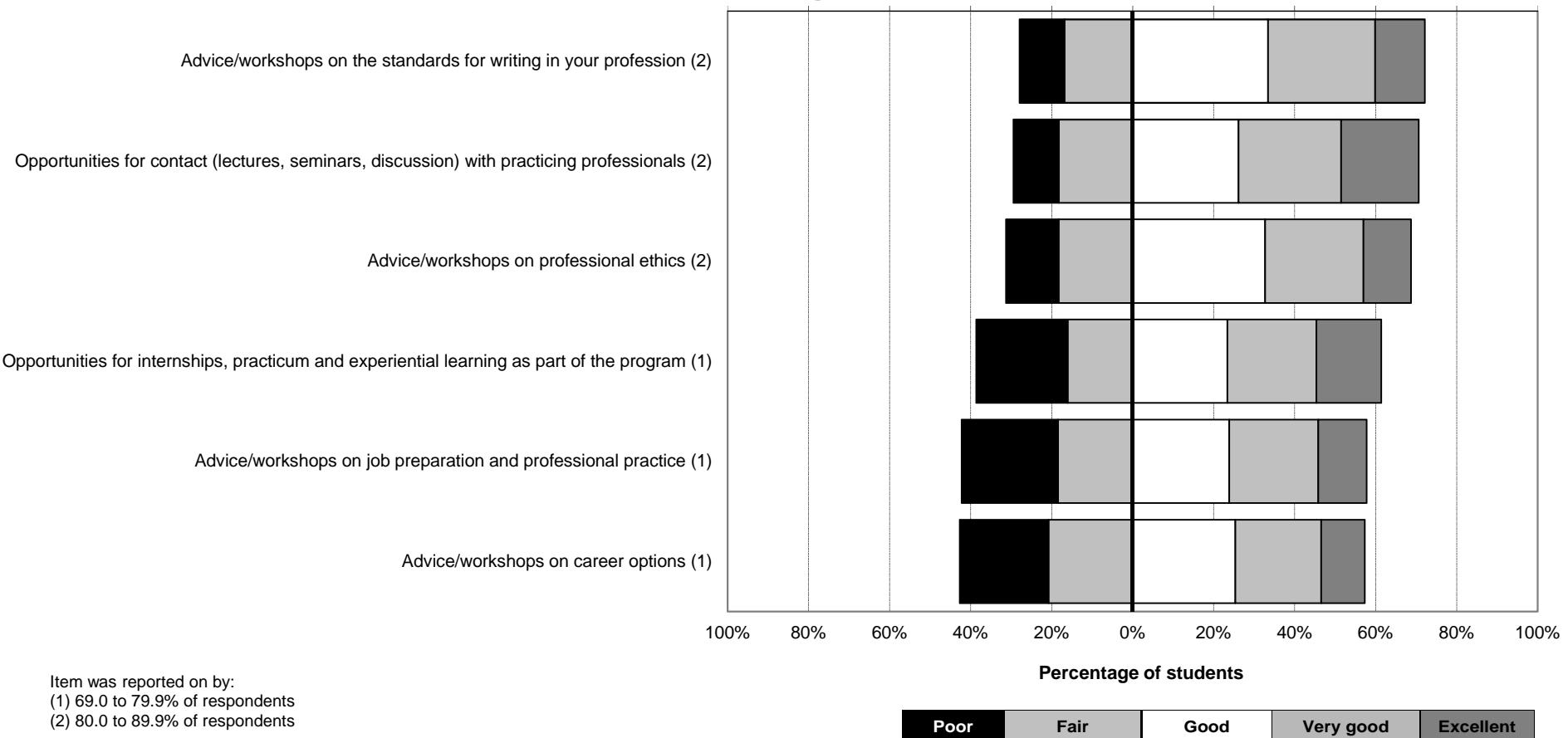


Figure 6c: Applied skills development for Master's level professional programs



University Services and Student Life

Respondents were asked to rate their experience over the past year with a variety of university services and resources. Results are summarized in Figure 7.

The most positive responses are for athletic facilities and library facilities, which about 80 percent of students characterize as “good,” “very good” or “excellent.” The ratings garnered by athletic facilities represent a significant increase over the 2010 round of the survey, when they were rated positively by two-thirds of respondents. The rating of library facilities has remained steady over the past three iterations of the survey, and scores are lower than the Ontario average.

Information technology services and the international office are each rated positively by about 70 percent. The weakest results are in the areas of housing assistance and food services, where positive ratings are provided by fewer than half of students.

A number of differences are observed between satisfaction at Ryerson and Ontario-wide ratings, with those at Ryerson tending to be lower. Students’ satisfaction with research labs, registrarial processes, health care services, the university bookstore, child care, career services, financial aid services, housing assistance and food services is more than 10 percentage points lower than the Ontario average.

Publications and Presentations

Respondents were asked about the prevalence, within their respective academic departments, of various activities relating to publications and presentations. Types of activities include attendance at scholarly meetings, publishing, and presentation of research. Results are presented separately for master’s students in research-focused programs and doctoral students in Figure 8.

The most frequent activity among both master’s and doctoral students is seminars and colloquia at which students present their research. Three quarters of master’s students and 86 percent of doctoral students indicate that this occurs in their department.

The least common activity reported by master’s students is publishing as a sole or first author in a refereed journal: 29 percent indicate that this occurs in their department. For doctoral students, the least common activity reported is attendance at national scholarly meetings: 50 percent report that this occurs in their department.

The reported prevalence of publications and presentation-related activities is generally lower at Ryerson than the provincial average. In particular, at the master’s level, students at Ryerson (43 percent) are significantly less likely than those province-wide (55 percent) to report that delivering papers or posters at national scholarly meetings occurs in their departments. And, at both the master’s and doctoral levels, Ryerson respondents are less likely than those province-wide to report occurrences of attendance at national scholarly meetings.

**Figure 7: Resources and Student Life,
Master's, Doctoral and Professional Students Combined**

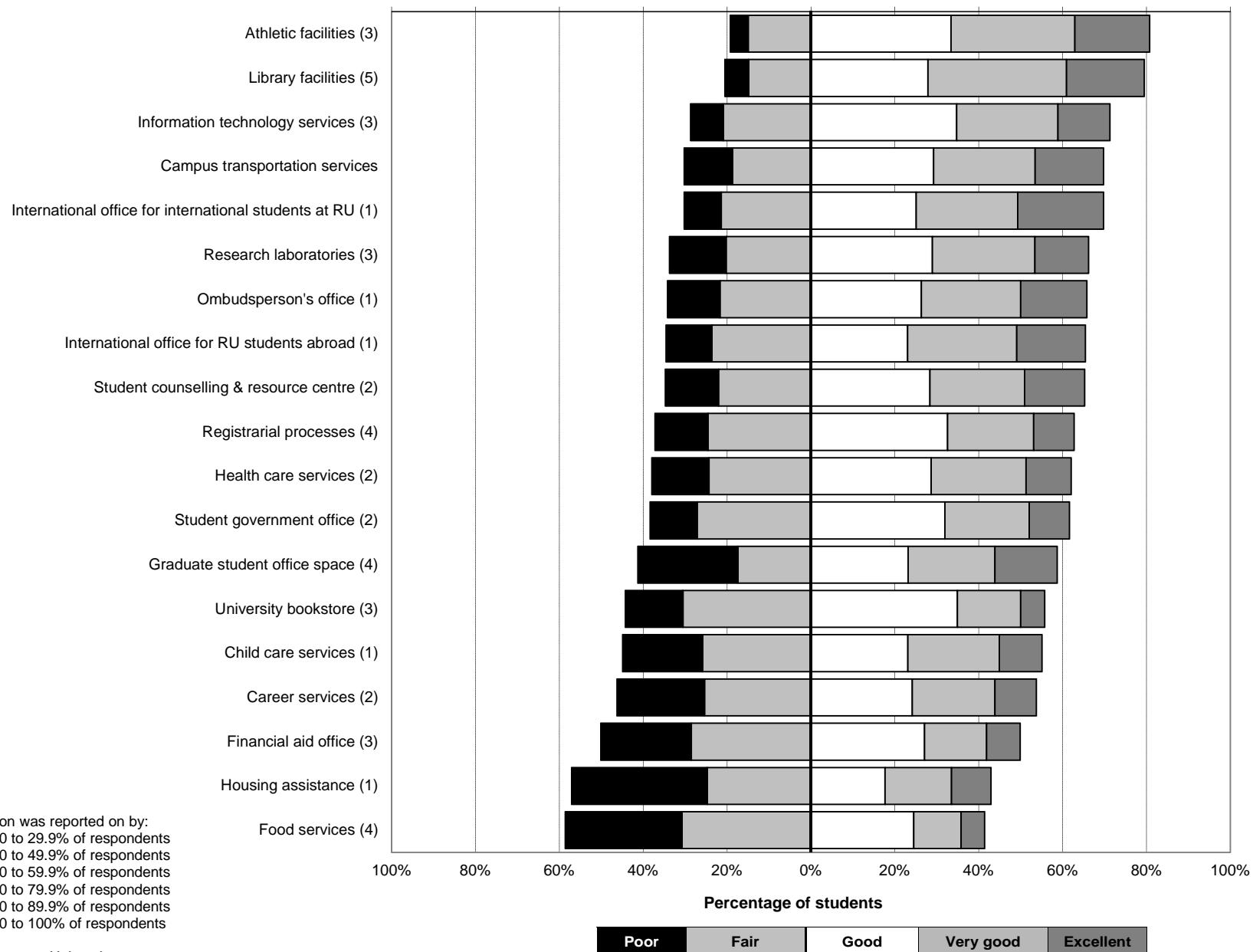
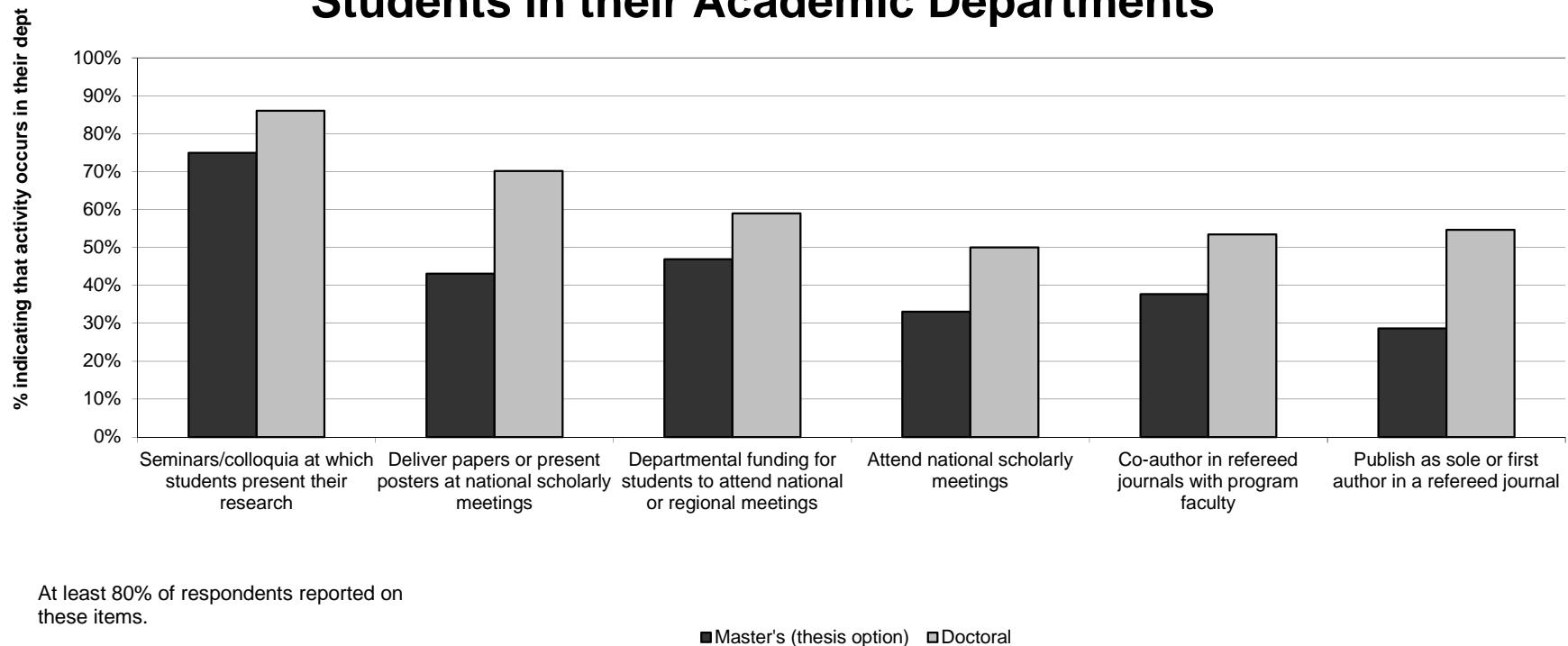


Figure 8: Publications and Presentations among Students in their Academic Departments



Obstacles to Academic Progress

Students were asked to identify the extent to which various items pose obstacles to their academic progress. The obstacle identified most commonly by both Ryerson and Ontario students is work and financial commitments. Forty-two percent of Ryerson respondents report that this is a “minor” obstacle and a further 37 percent indicate that it is a “major” obstacle. About half of Ryerson students indicate that course scheduling, program structure or requirements, and family obligations, respectively, pose obstacles to their progress.

The least common obstacles noted by Ryerson students are immigration laws and regulations, described as “not an obstacle” by 90 percent, and the availability of faculty, described as “not an obstacle” by 62 percent. (It should be noted that when one includes only international students, immigration laws and regulations are named as either a minor or major obstacle by 45 percent.) Results are similar to those at other Ontario universities.

Master’s and doctoral students are fairly similar in terms of the proportion facing various obstacles, although master’s students are somewhat more likely than their doctoral counterparts to indicate course scheduling issues (47 percent at the master’s level and 40 percent among the doctoral group). Doctoral students are more likely than master’s to name immigration issues (19 percent across all doctoral students versus 9 percent at the master’s level; 52 percent of doctoral international students versus 42 percent of master’s international students).

Education Financing

Respondents were asked to indicate what forms of financial support they receive while enrolled in their program of study. Among master’s students, the most common source of financial support is loans, savings, or family assistance, identified by 46 percent of respondents, followed by teaching assistantships, cited by 38 percent. The most commonly cited sources of financial support among doctoral students are teaching assistantships, cited by 76 percent of respondents, followed by research assistantships, identified by 62 percent.

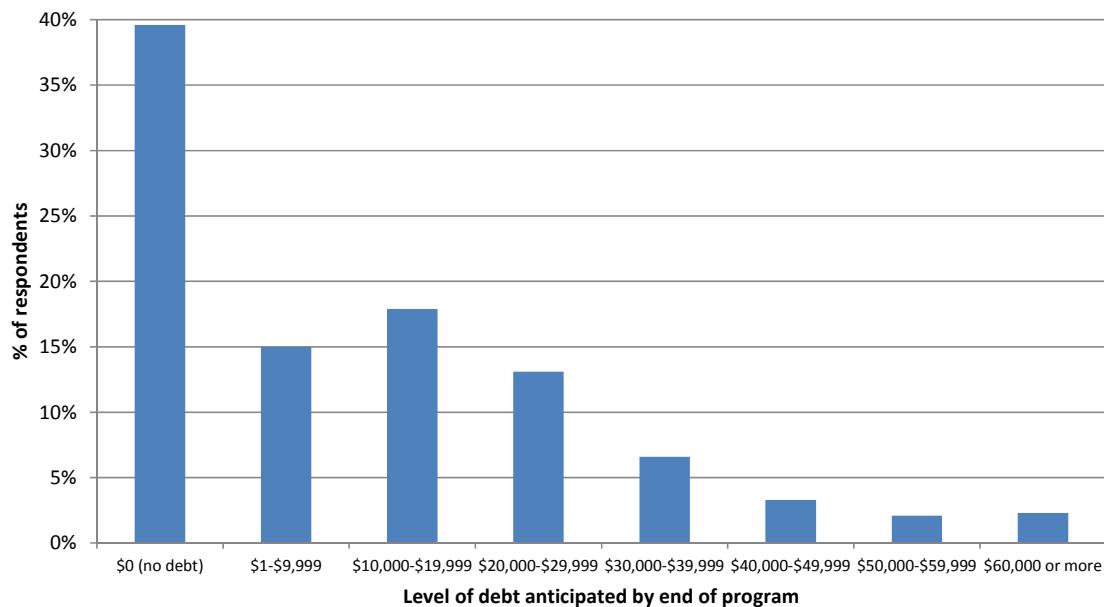
A higher proportion of Ryerson doctoral students have a provincial government scholarship than the Ontario average. The proportion of doctoral students with a federal granting council scholarship, however, is lower at Ryerson than province-wide, as is the percentage of students who receive full tuition scholarships or waivers.

At the master’s level, a higher percentage of students at Ryerson report receiving partial tuition scholarships or waivers than the provincial average. A lower percentage of Ryerson master’s students report receiving university-funded fellowships and bursaries than the Ontario-wide group.

60 percent of respondents predict that by the end of their program, they will have accumulated debt in support of their graduate education. The distribution of respondents by anticipated level of debt appears in Figure 9. A higher proportion of Ryerson respondents than those Ontario-wide predict that they will have some amount of debt upon completion of their

graduate program (60 percent compared to 53 percent). The difference in proportion is greatest at the doctoral level.

Figure 9: Graduate debt levels predicted by respondents (n=898)



Social Life

About 80 percent of respondents report that organized social activities are held within their department occasionally or frequently. Among these students, 80 percent report attending the activities. A lower number, 53 percent, report that organized social activities are held with their advisor or research group, but 86 percent of these students participate in activities when they are held.

Ryerson respondents report attending social activities with their advisor or research group to an extent that is similar to graduate students province-wide. However, departmental social activities are more prevalent province-wide than they are at Ryerson.

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 compares the characteristics of survey respondents to the graduate student population at Ryerson. (For the purposes of this report, master's programs are categorized into "professional" and "research-focused.") Generally, the program mix of the survey sample mirrors the Ryerson graduate population, and the sample is representative in terms of gender.

The graduate student population at Ryerson is somewhat different from that of other Ontario universities. First, graduate students at Ryerson tend to be older than the Ontario average.

While the CGPSS results do not include a mean age for Ontario universities, 38 percent of Ryerson respondents are above the age of 30 at the time of the survey, compared to 31 percent of students system-wide. Second, whereas provincially 58 percent of survey respondents are female, 49 percent of Ryerson respondents are female. (This is a change from the previous round of the survey, conducted in 2010, when 44 percent of Ryerson respondents were female.) This is representative of the actual graduate student population at Ryerson and reflects the University's program mix. Finally, the proportion of graduate students in doctoral programs is lower at Ryerson than province-wide.

Table 1: Comparison of survey sample and population characteristics

	Sample		Population	
Gender				
Female	475	48.7%	1,108	47.2%
Male	500	51.3%	1,241	52.8%
<i>Total</i>	<i>975</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>2,349</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
<i>Master's Programs (Professionally-focused)</i>				
Aerospace Engineering (MEng)	15	2.5%	34	2.3%
Architecture	20	3.3%	62	4.1%
Biomedical Physics (MSc)	10	1.6%	29	1.9%
Building Science	26	4.3%	57	3.8%
Business Administration	63	10.4%	132	8.8%
Chemical Engineering (MEng)	8	1.3%	18	1.2%
Civil Engineering (MEng)	19	3.1%	59	3.9%
Computer Networks (MEng)	33	5.4%	90	6.0%
Computer Science	27	4.4%	57	3.8%
Documentary Media	21	3.5%	55	3.7%
Early Childhood Studies	9	1.5%	29	1.9%
Electrical & Computer Engineering (MEng)	34	5.6%	99	6.6%
Fashion	14	2.3%	32	2.1%
Immigration and Settlement	17	2.8%	43	2.9%
International Economics	12	2.0%	32	2.1%
Journalism	19	3.1%	53	3.5%
Mechanical Engineering (MEng)	24	4.0%	68	4.5%
Media Production	9	1.5%	25	1.7%
Management of Technology & Innovation	40	6.6%	86	5.8%
Nursing	54	8.9%	154	10.3%
Nutrition Communication	9	1.5%	16	1.1%
Photographic Preservation	17	2.8%	44	2.9%
Professional Communication	10	1.6%	21	1.4%
Public Policy and Admin	30	4.9%	65	4.3%
Social Work	16	2.6%	40	2.7%
Spatial Analysis	16	2.6%	31	2.1%
Urban Development	35	5.8%	64	4.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>607</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>1,495</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 1, continued

		Sample	Population
<i>Master's Programs ("Regular" research-focused)</i>			
Aerospace Engineering (MASc)	5	3.2%	20
Applied Mathematics	9	5.8%	24
Chemical Engineering (MASc)	1	0.6%	10
Civil Engineering (MASc)	11	7.1%	26
Communication and Culture	19	12.3%	39
Computer Networks (MASc)	3	1.9%	9
Electrical & Computer Engineering (MASc)	15	9.7%	43
Environmental & Applied Science & Management	29	18.7%	72
Literatures of Modernity	8	5.2%	23
Mechanical Engineering (MASc)	16	10.3%	33
Molecular Science	13	8.4%	34
Nursing (thesis option)	8	5.2%	23
Philosophy	9	5.8%	29
Psychology	9	5.8%	31
<i>Total</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>416</i>
<i>Doctoral Programs</i>			
Aerospace Engineering	12	5.6%	27
Chemical Engineering	6	2.8%	17
Civil Engineering	15	7.0%	37
Communication and Culture	17	8.0%	41
Computer Science	6	2.8%	13
Economics	3	1.4%	10
Electrical & Computer Engineering	34	16.0%	73
Environmental & Applied Science & Management	17	8.0%	22
Mechanical Engineering	40	18.8%	81
Molecular Science	6	2.8%	9
Physics	5	2.3%	11
Policy Studies	19	8.9%	32
Psychology	33	15.5%	65
<i>Total</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>438</i>

Conclusions

It is encouraging that assessments provided by Ryerson graduate students are, generally, very positive. The University scores particularly well in terms of general satisfaction and assessments of faculty, particularly doctoral students' impressions of their dissertation advisors.

Along with these strengths, a few aspects are identified that may require further follow-up and possible enhancement. These might include enriching experiences such as activities relating to

presentations and publications, as well as further examination of the differences between master's and doctoral respondents.

Comparisons of Ryerson's results with those at the Ontario level must be made with caution, as differences may be attributable to Ryerson's specialized program mix (relative to a broader mix of programs province-wide).

Ryerson's Academic Plan for 2008 to 2013, *Shaping Our Future*, emphasizes graduate programming as an integral component of the University's growth and development. It is anticipated that the results of the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) will continue to play a useful role in the evolution of graduate studies at Ryerson throughout the period of the next Academic Plan.

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