

CANADIAN GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2010

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 first time at Ryerson in 2007, and a second round was undertaken three years later, in February 2010. Initially developed for use in the United States, the survey has been adapted for Canadian use. All Ontario universities offering graduate programs participated in the survey in 2007 and 2010. Results allow one to assess Ryerson's progress in the provision of a high quality graduate experience.

All graduate students at Ryerson were invited by email to participate in the online survey. A total of 2,120 students were contacted, and 805 responded, yielding a response rate of 38 percent. Among Ryerson's respondents, 675 students (84 percent) were enrolled in master's programs, and 130 students (16 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 similar to those at other Ontario universities.

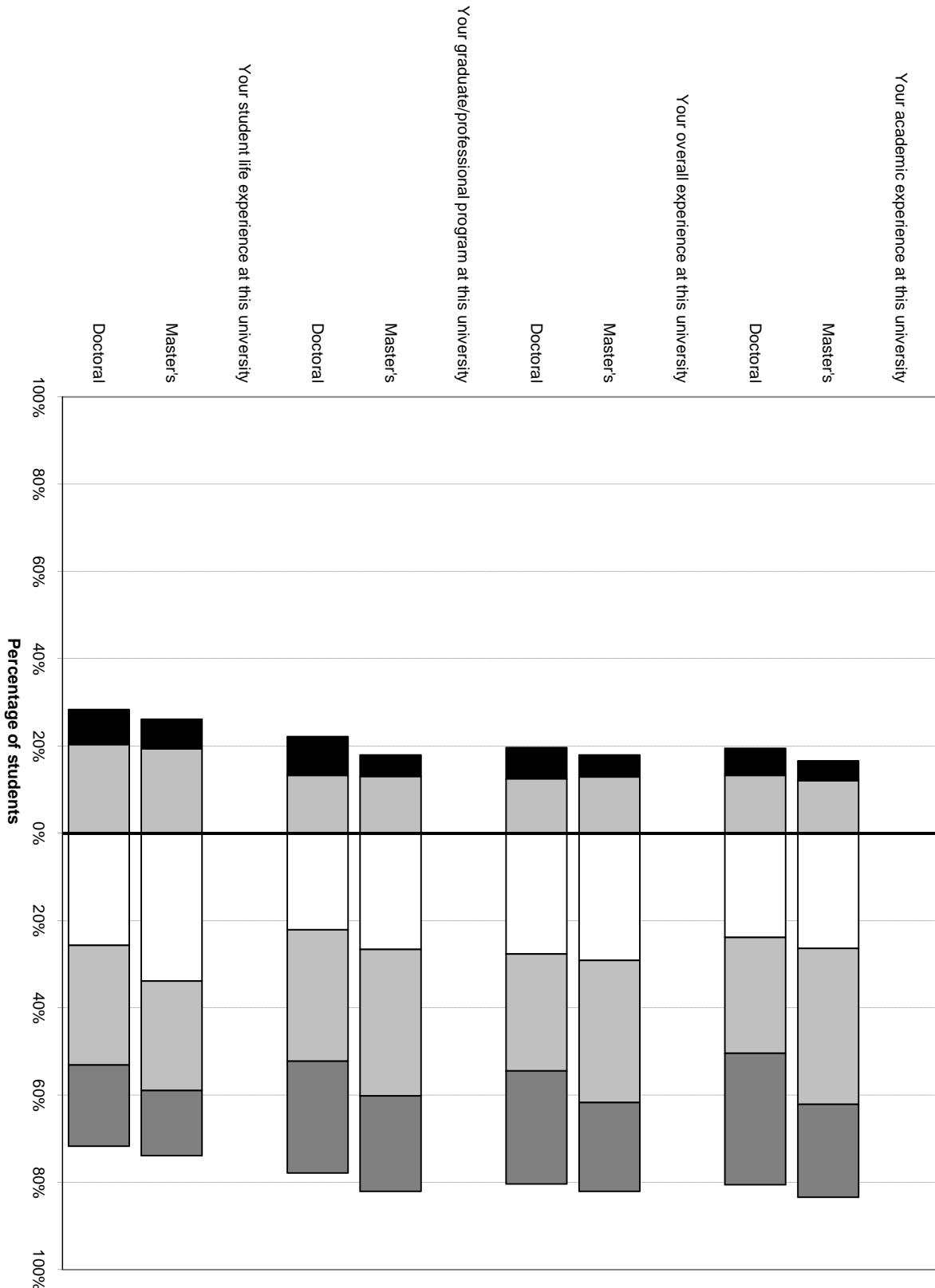
Overall, 83 percent of students report that their academic experience at Ryerson is "good," "very good" or "excellent." Similarly, 82 percent are satisfied with their overall experience and 74 percent with their student life experience at Ryerson. Master's and doctoral students respond similarly.

Over 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.

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 tend to be more positive than doctoral students in this regard.

¹ Results are estimated to be accurate within 2.9 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 3.0 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

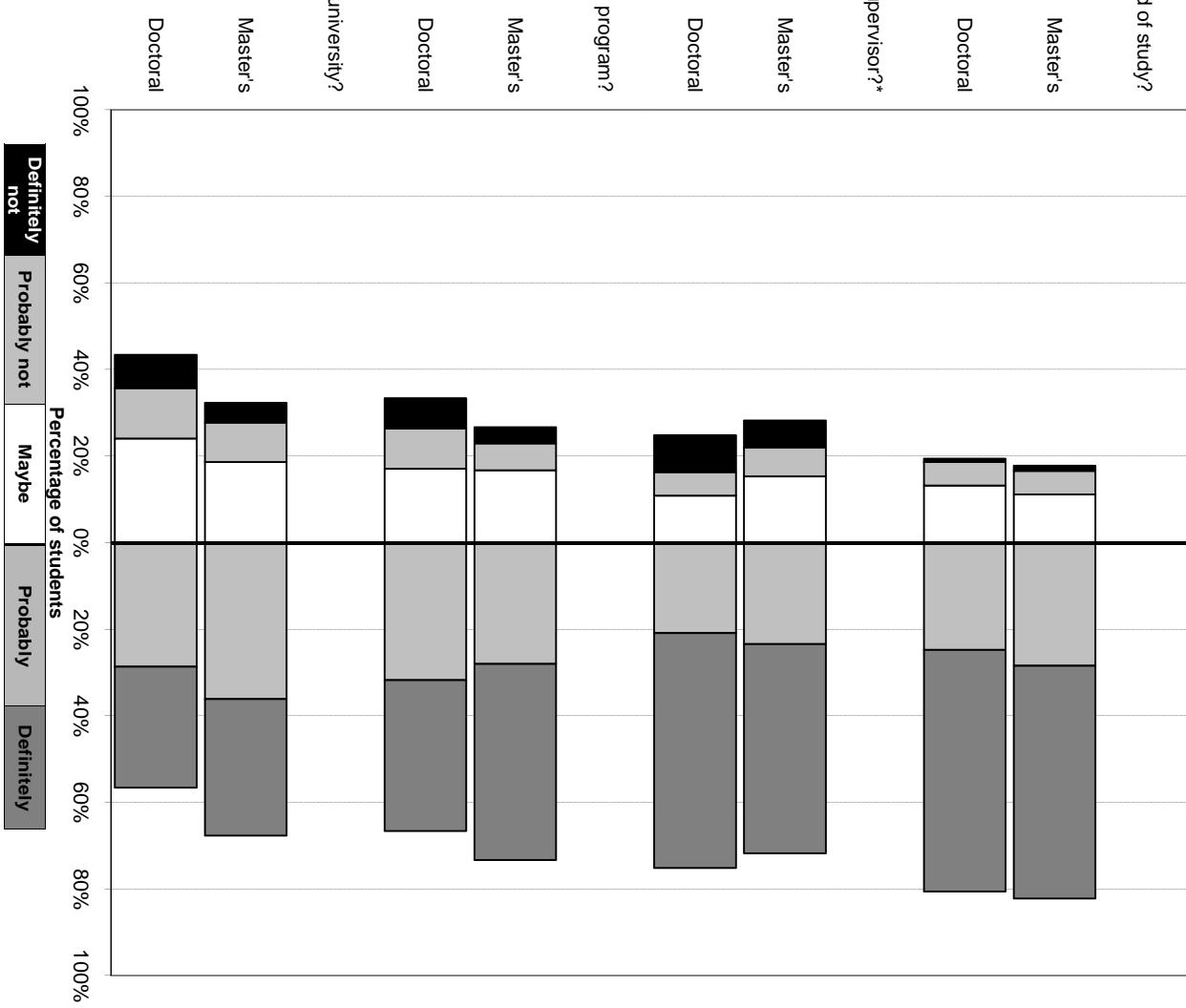


At least 86% of respondents reported on these items.

Figure 2: General Satisfaction with Program

If you were to start your graduate career again, would you select the same field of study?

If you were to start your graduate career again, would you select the same faculty supervisor?*



Assessment of Faculty

Respondents' assessments of the faculty members in their program are very favourable. The vast majority of respondents at both Ryerson (91 percent) and across Ontario (96 percent) rate the intellectual quality of faculty as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Between 82 and 86 percent of Ryerson respondents express satisfaction with faculty teaching and the relationship between faculty and graduate students. Master's students tend to provide more positive ratings on these items than do doctoral respondents. Results are summarized in Figure 3.

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 4.

86 percent of respondents indicate that the intellectual quality of their fellow students is "good," "very good" or "excellent." Similarly, 85 percent indicate that the amount of coursework in their programs is appropriate. Over 80 percent of Ryerson students report that opportunities for student collaboration and teamwork are "good," "very good" or "excellent." Results at the Ontario level are similar to those at Ryerson.

83 percent of master's students and 69 percent at the doctoral level report that the relationship of program content to their research or professional goals is "good" or better. Ryerson is at the Ontario average at the master's level in this regard, but lower than other Ontario universities at the doctoral level.

Slightly fewer than two-thirds of Ryerson students describe the availability of courses needed to complete one's program as "good," "very good" or "excellent," compared to the provincial average of 74 percent.

Assessment of Academic and Other Support

80 percent of respondents indicate that the level of help provided by staff members in their program is "good," "very good" or "excellent." 71 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 for academic advising are comparable to the Ontario average, while satisfaction at Ryerson appears to be somewhat lower than average in terms of help provided by staff members and advice on financial support.

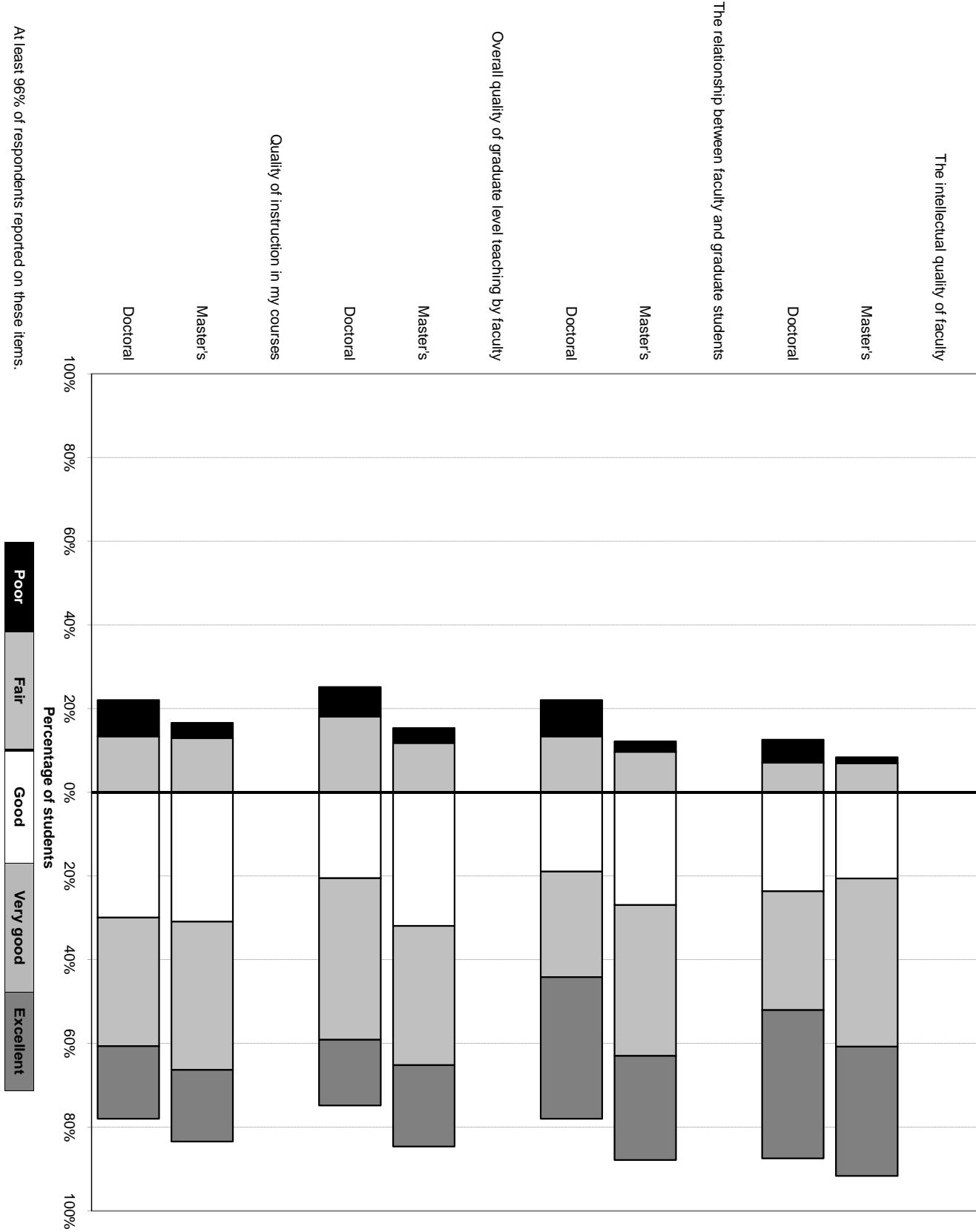
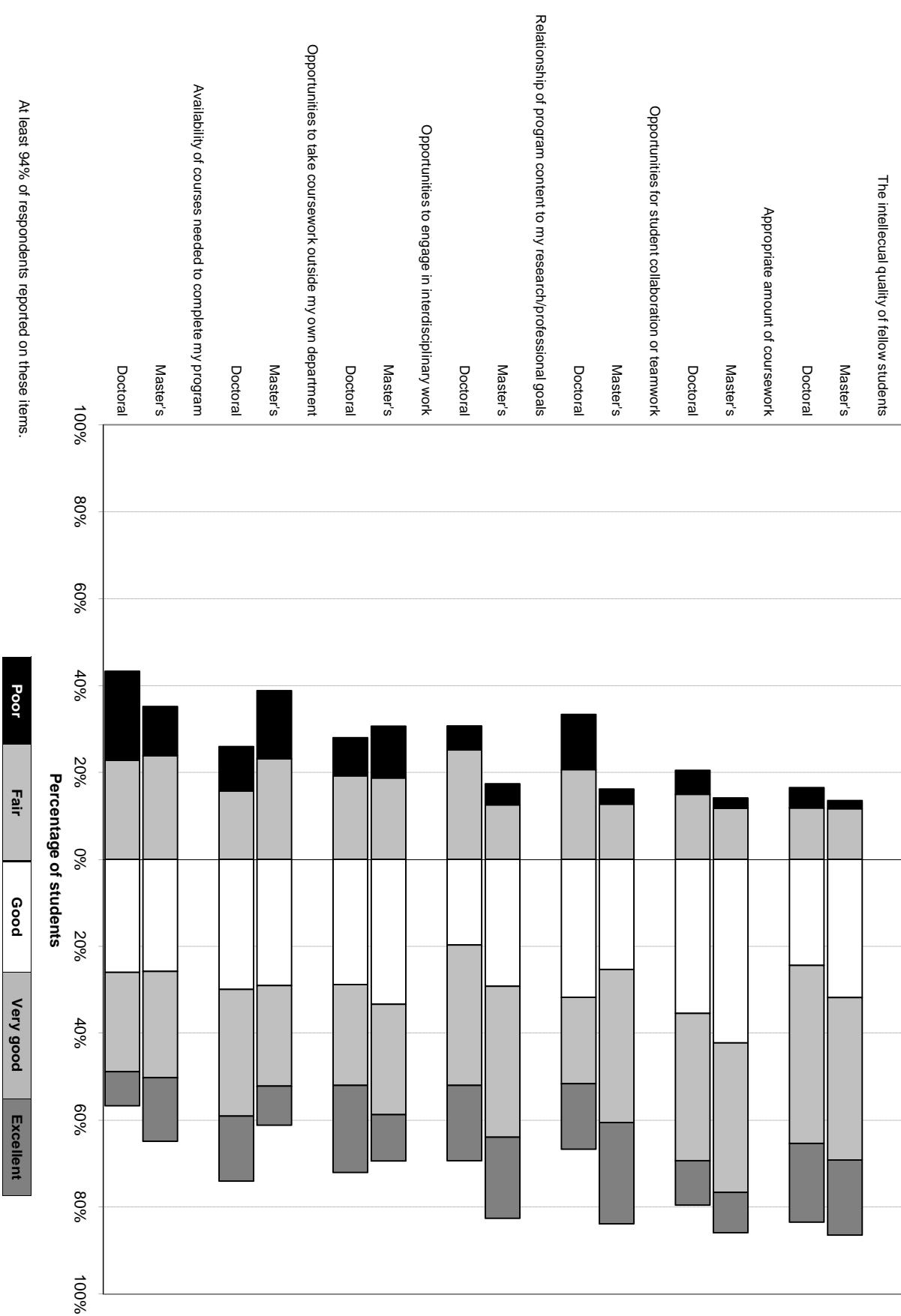
Figure 3: Assessment of Faculty

Figure 4: Assessment of Program



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, and with feedback on their research. Each of these aspects is characterized as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” by about three-quarters of respondents.

Students are least satisfied with career-related advice or workshops: about half describe advice/workshops on career options *within* academia, as well as *outside* academia, as “good,” “very good” or “excellent.” Results are summarized in Figure 5a.

For most items, Ryerson's results are comparable to other Ontario universities. The exception is advice or workshops about research positions, which is rated positively by 55 percent of Ryerson respondents, but 48 percent of respondents Ontario-wide.

Applied skills in doctoral programs:

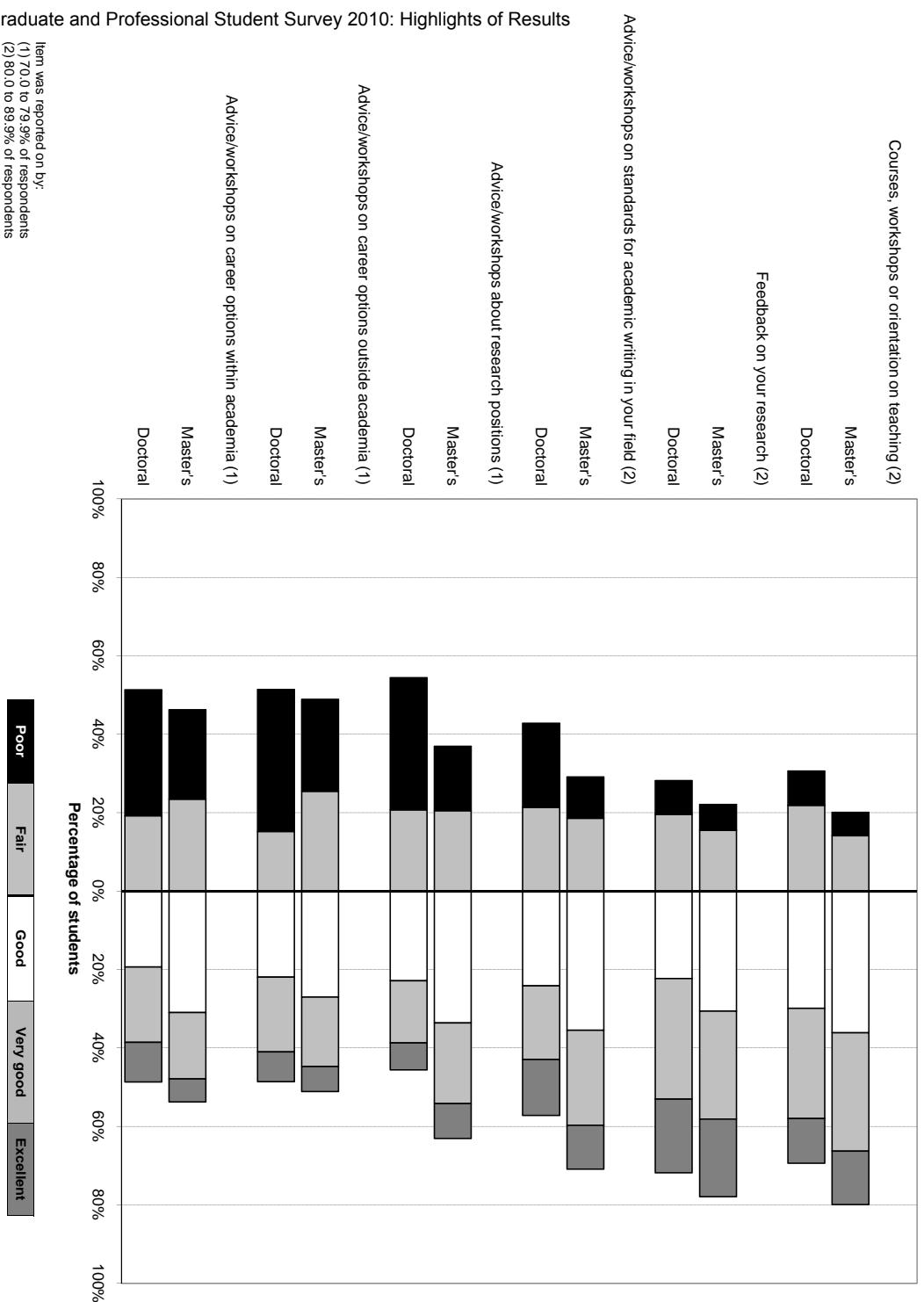
Support or opportunities for conducting independent research, as well as the provision of faculty guidance on formulating a research topic, receive generally positive assessments from doctoral students at Ryerson. The former is described as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” by about 79 percent of respondents, and the latter is described in this way by 74 percent. Less positive are the ratings of advice/workshops on preparing for candidacy exams (54 percent of respondents express satisfaction in this area) and writing grant proposals (51 percent). Results are summarized in Figure 5b.

In comparison to the Ontario average for doctoral students, Ryerson scores lower in three areas. Training in research methods before beginning one's own research is rated positively by 57 percent at Ryerson and 66 percent across Ontario. Advice or workshops on preparing for candidacy exams and on writing grant proposals is rated positively by a little more than half of Ryerson doctoral students, and by a little more than 60 percent Ontario-wide.

Applied skills in professionally-based master's programs:

71 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. About two-thirds respond positively to questions on the development of various skills including writing, professional ethics and professional practice. Results, which tend to be lower than the Ontario average, are summarized in Figure 5c.

Figure 5a: Applied/Research Skills, rating of support/training received



Item was reported on by:
(1) 70.0 to 79.9% of respondents
(2) 80.0 to 89.9% of respondents

Figure 5b: Research skills for doctoral students, rating of support received or opportunities provided

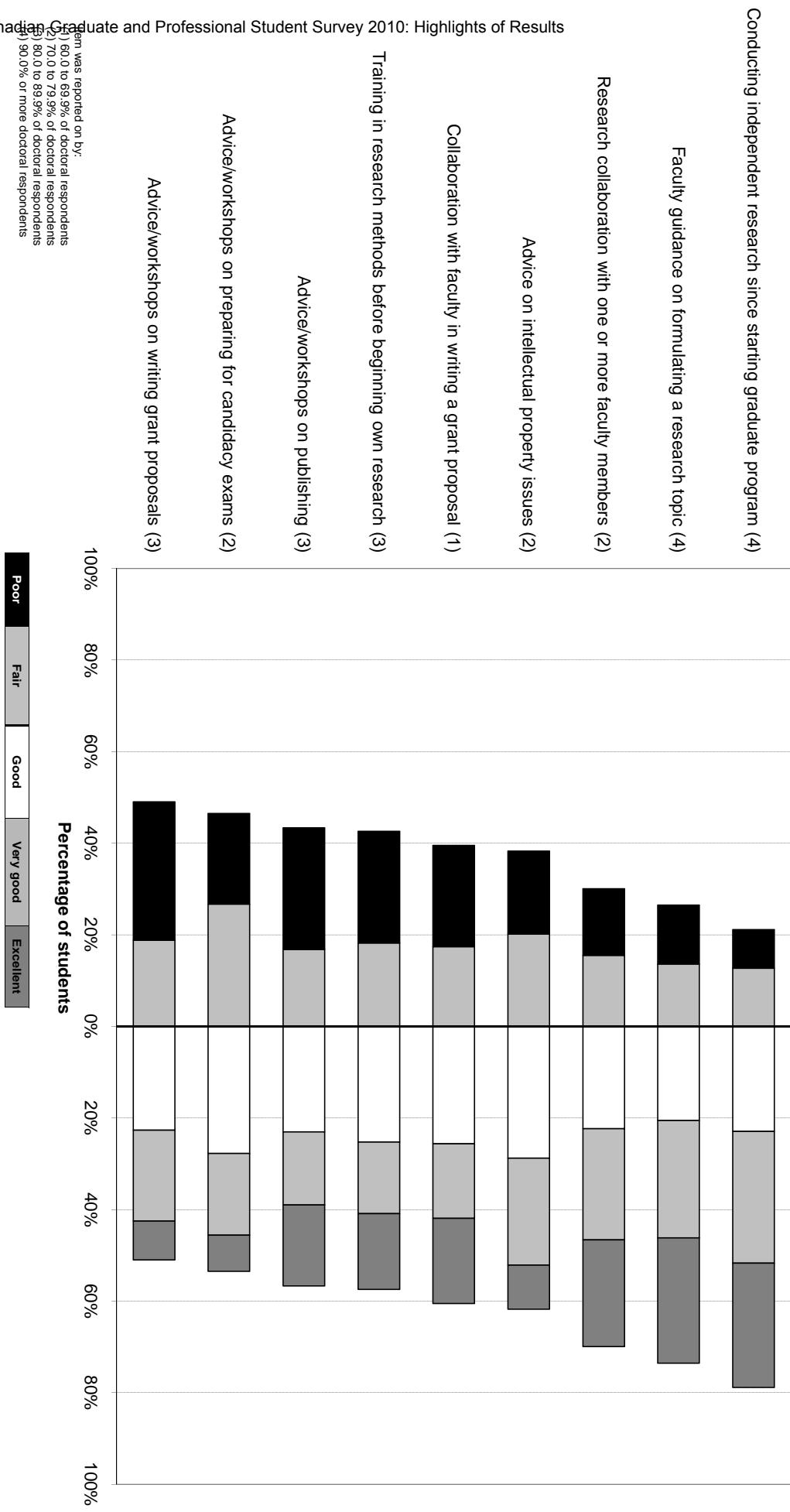
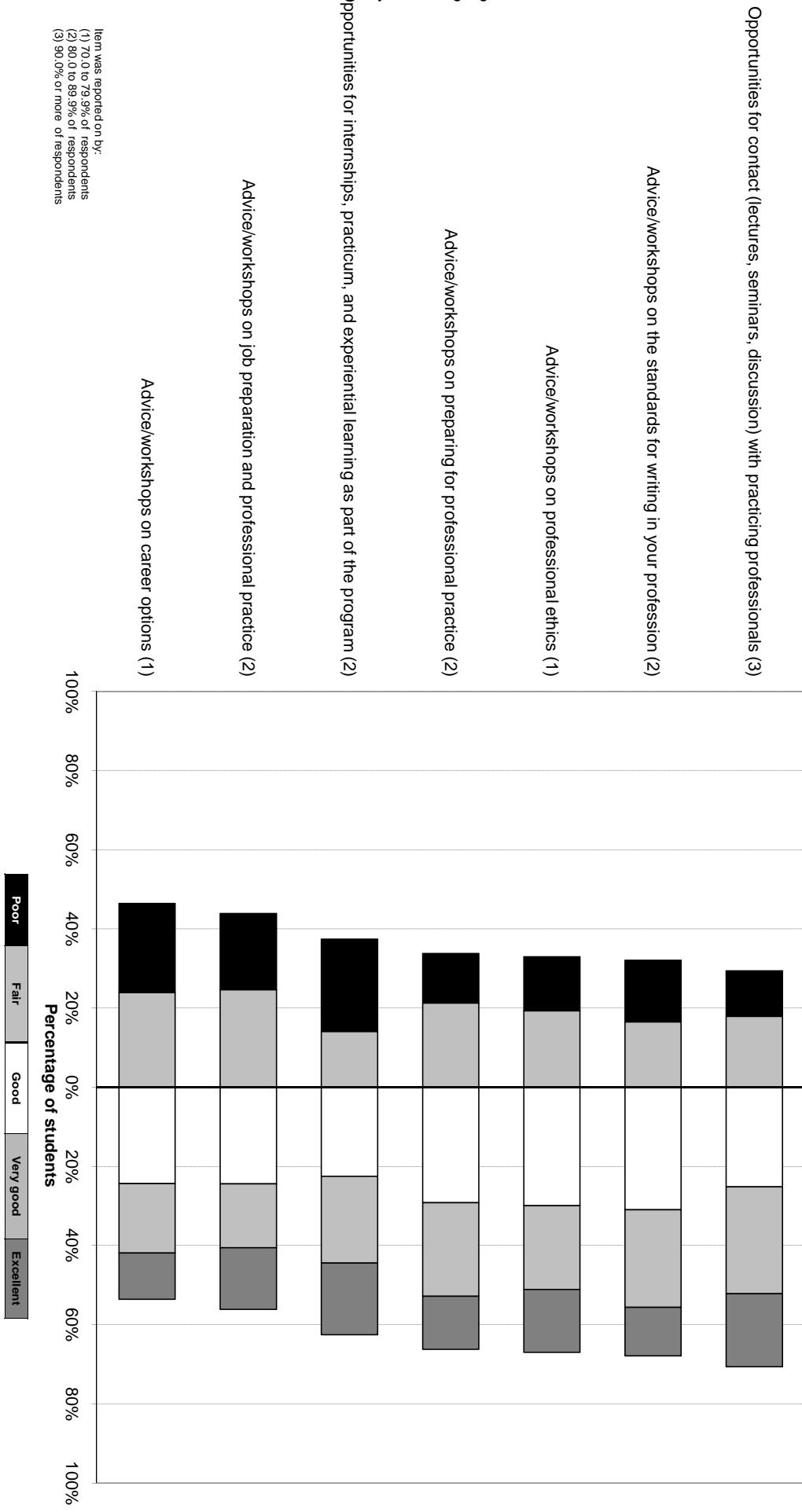


Figure 5c: Applied skills development for Master's level professional programs



Dissertation Advisors for Doctoral Students

Thirteen questions regarding students' dissertation advisors were posed. Students were asked whether advisors were helpful in the preparation of the dissertation; questions focused on selecting a dissertation topic, developing the proposal and writing the dissertation. Other items asked doctoral students about their advisors' role in preparing for oral and written exams, providing feedback on their work, and serving as an advocate. Reported satisfaction is high for all items. The percentage of doctoral students providing a favourable assessment of a given item ranges from 83 to 95 percent.

The vast majority of students (95 percent) agree that their dissertation advisors are available for regular meetings and indicate that advisors are knowledgeable about formal degree requirements. Similarly, over 90 percent of doctoral students indicate that advisors return their work promptly, 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 6.

Student satisfaction at Ryerson is equal to or higher than that among Ontario peers for all questions in this area. Around 90 percent of students report that dissertation advisors were very helpful to them in preparing for both written and oral qualifying exams, compared to slightly more than 80 percent at the Ontario level.

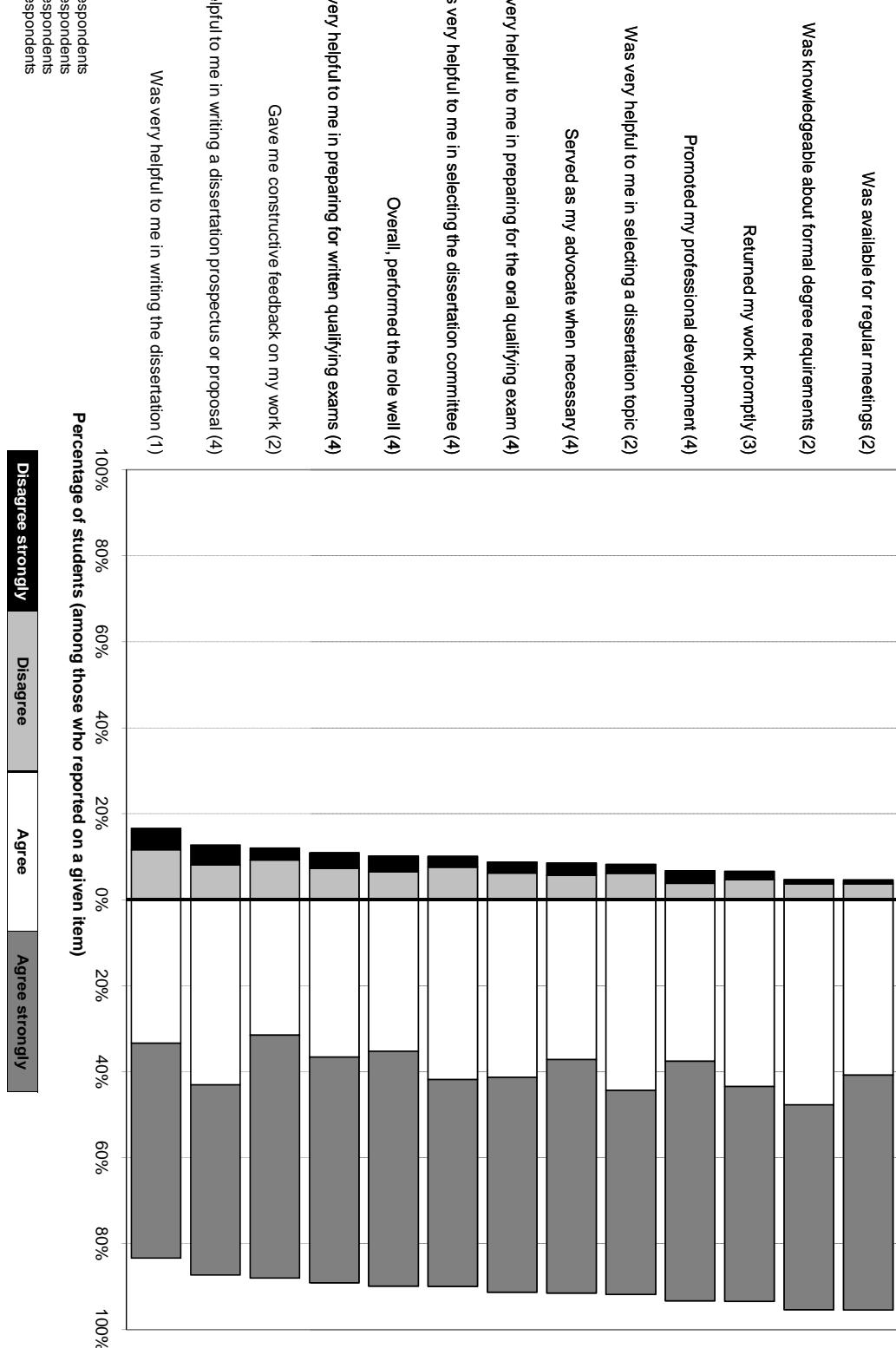
University Resources and Student Life

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.

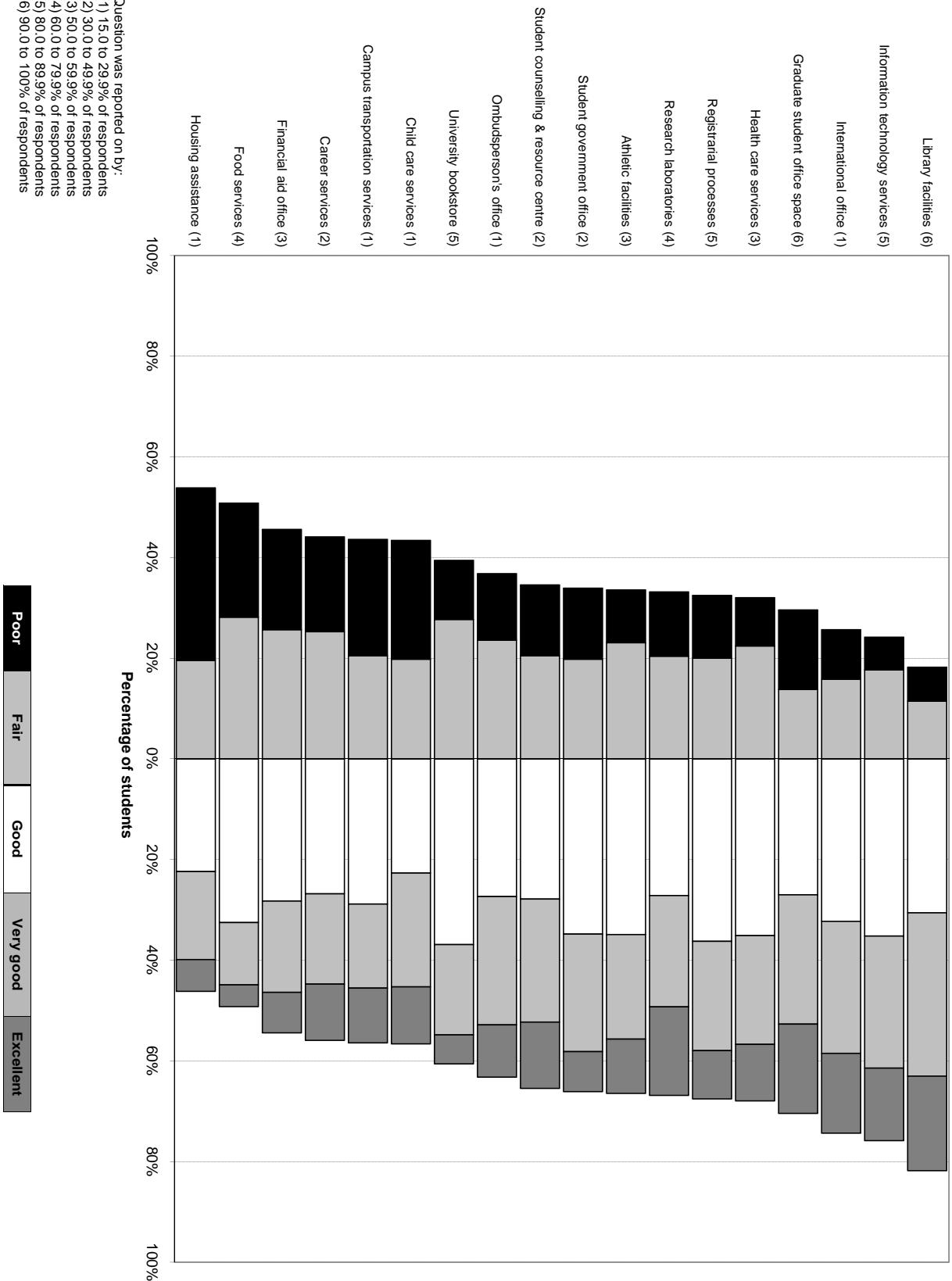
The most positive responses are for library facilities, which 82 percent of students characterize as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Information technology services are rated positively by 76 percent and the international office by 74 percent. The weakest results are in the areas of housing assistance and food services, where positive ratings are provided by fewer than half of students.

Compared to the previous round of CGPSS, conducted in 2007, students in 2010 provide significantly higher ratings of graduate student office space (rated positively by 70 percent in 2010 compared to 58 percent in 2007). Conversely, athletic facilities receive a positive rating by fewer students in 2010 (66 percent) than in 2007 (78 percent).

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 housing assistance, the University bookstore, athletic facilities and research labs is more than 10 percentage points lower than the Ontario average.

Figure 6: Dissertation Advisors, Doctoral Students' Assessment

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



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. Seventy percent of master's students and 75 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: 25 percent indicate that this occurs in their department. For doctoral students, the least common activity reported is attendance at national scholarly meetings: 41 percent report that this occurs in their department.

The reported prevalence of publications and presentation-related activities is lower at Ryerson than the provincial average. In particular, at both the master's and doctoral levels, students at Ryerson are much less likely than those province-wide to report that attendance at national scholarly meetings occurs in their departments.

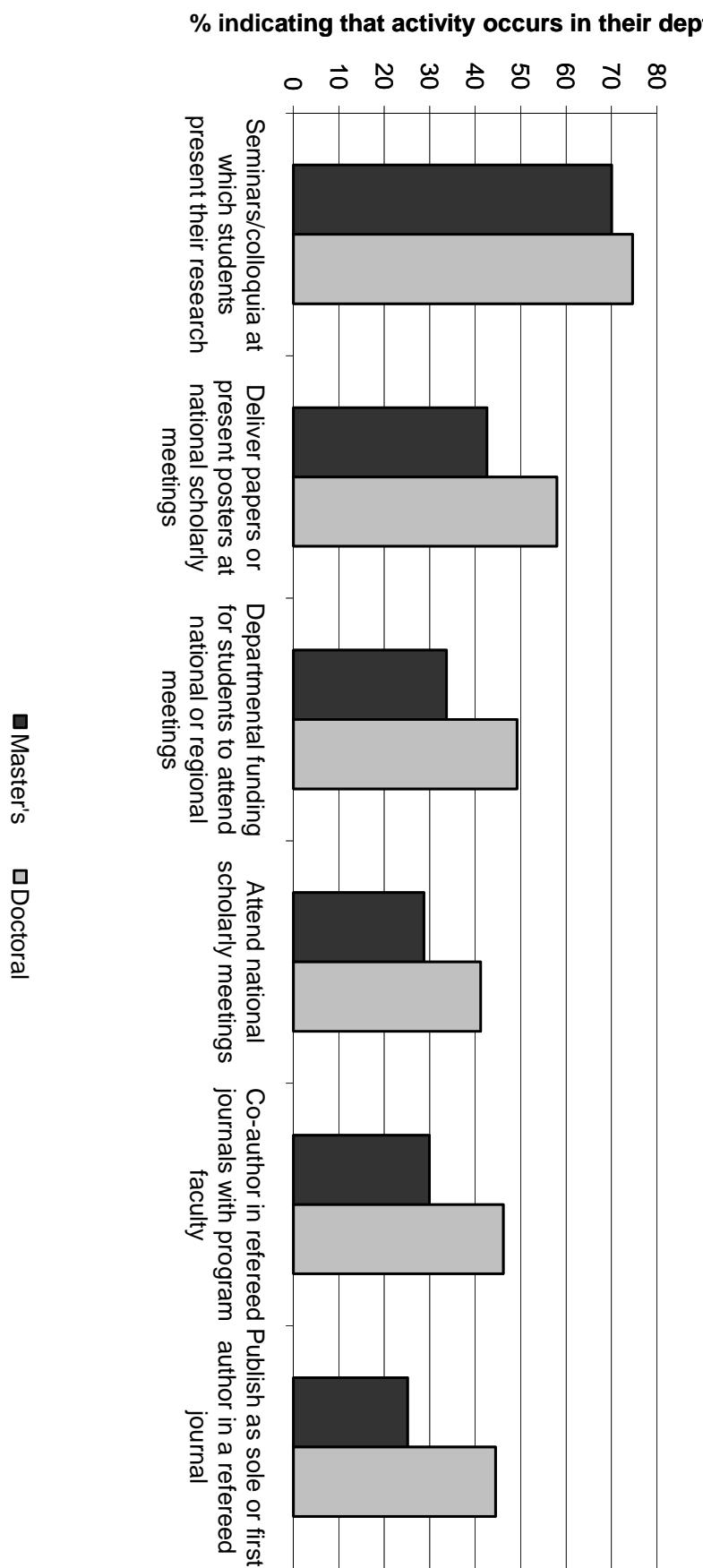
Obstacles to Academic Progress

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. Thirty-eight percent of Ryerson respondents report that this is a "minor" obstacle and a further 42 percent indicate that it is a "major" obstacle.

Approximately 46 percent of Ryerson students indicate that course scheduling and program structure or requirements, respectively, pose obstacles to their progress. Over half (58 percent) claim that family obligations are an obstacle.

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 61 percent). Results are similar to those at other Ontario universities.

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



Education Financing

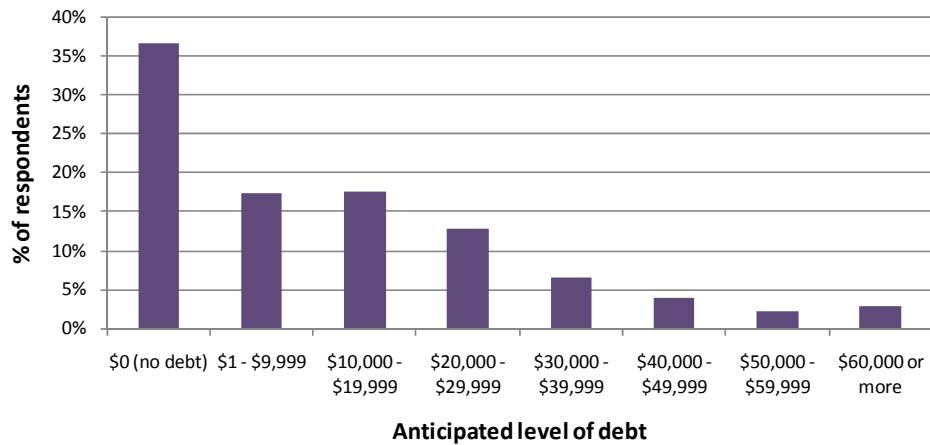
Respondents were asked to indicate what forms of financial support they receive while enrolled in their program of study. Among master's students, the most common source of financial support is loans, savings, or family assistance, identified by 47 percent of respondents, followed by teaching assistantships, cited by 31 percent. The most commonly cited sources of financial support among doctoral students are teaching assistantships, cited by 83 percent of respondents, followed by research assistantships, identified by 60 percent.

A significantly higher proportion of Ryerson doctoral students hold a teaching assistantship than the Ontario average. The proportion of doctoral students with a federal granting council scholarship, however, is lower at Ryerson than province-wide. (There is no difference between Ryerson and the Ontario average with respect to provincial government scholarships.)

At the master's level, Ryerson is fairly similar to the rest of the province with the exception of university-funded fellowships and bursaries -- a lower percentage of Ryerson master's students report receiving this source of funding than the Ontario average.

63 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.

Figure 9: Graduate debt levels predicted by respondents (n = 706)



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 (63 percent compared to 52 percent). It is notable that a higher proportion of Ryerson respondents have children than do students at other Ontario universities, and that students with children are more likely to report debt.

Social Life

The vast majority (90 percent) of respondents report attending organized social activities within their advisor/research group “occasionally” or “frequently.” 84 percent report attending organized social activities within their department at least occasionally, while almost half report similarly with respect to university-wide social activities.

Ryerson respondents report attending social activities to an extent that is similar to graduate students province-wide.

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 loosely categorized into “professional” and “research-focused.”) The sample is representative in terms of gender. The mean age of respondents is somewhat older than the mean of the actual graduate population. Generally, the program mix of the survey sample mirrors the Ryerson graduate population, with the exception of Nursing students, who are underrepresented slightly, and Mechanical Engineering students, who are overrepresented somewhat.

The graduate student population at Ryerson is 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, 44 percent of Ryerson respondents are above the age of 30 at the time of the survey, compared to 34 percent of students system-wide. Second, whereas provincially 56 percent of survey respondents are female, just 44 percent of Ryerson respondents are female. This is representative of the actual graduate student population at Ryerson and reflects the University’s program mix.

The proportion of graduate students in doctoral programs is much lower at Ryerson than province-wide.

Table 1: Comparison of survey sample and population characteristics

	Sample		Population	
Gender				
Female	352	43.7%	935	44.1%
Male	453	56.3%	1,185	55.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>805</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>2,120</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Mean Age (years)*	32.1		31.1	
Master's Programs ("Regular" research-focused)*				
Aerospace Engineering (MSc)	13	5.6%	26	4.6%
Applied Mathematics	4	1.7%	11	1.9%
Chemical Engineering (MSc)	9	3.9%	20	3.5%
Civil Engineering (MSc)	11	4.8%	30	5.3%
Communication and Culture	24	10.4%	64	11.3%
Computer Networks (MSc)	5	2.2%	6	1.1%
Electrical and Computer Engineering (MSc)	25	10.8%	60	10.6%
Environmental Applied Science and Management	30	13.0%	68	12.0%
Literatures of Modernity	7	3.0%	21	3.7%
Mechanical Engineering (MSc)	27	11.7%	49	8.7%
Molecular Science	10	4.3%	29	5.1%
Nursing	49	21.2%	149	26.4%
Psychology	17	7.4%	32	5.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>565</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Master's Programs (Professionally focused)*				
Aerospace Engineering (MEng)	14	3.2%	34	2.6%
Architecture	25	5.6%	66	5.1%
Biomedical Physics	9	2.0%	23	1.8%
Building Science	19	4.3%	42	3.3%
Business Administration	31	7.0%	101	7.8%
Chemical Engineering (MEng)	2	0.5%	14	1.1%
Civil Engineering (MEng)	21	4.7%	83	6.4%
Computer Networks (MEng)	32	7.2%	99	7.7%
Computer Science	22	5.0%	57	4.4%
Documentary Media	25	5.6%	56	4.4%
Early Childhood Studies	17	3.8%	41	3.2%
Electrical and Computer Engineering (MEng)	26	5.9%	83	6.4%
Immigration and Settlement	21	4.7%	54	4.2%
International Economics	8	1.8%	39	3.0%
Journalism	12	2.7%	55	4.3%
Mechanical Engineering (MEng)	26	5.9%	79	6.1%
Media Production	6	1.4%	22	1.7%
Management of Technology and Innovation	40	9.0%	81	6.3%
Nutrition Communication	8	1.8%	21	1.6%
Photographic Preservation	14	3.2%	49	3.8%
Public Policy and Administration	18	4.1%	71	5.5%
Social Work	11	2.5%	30	2.3%
Spatial Analysis	10	2.3%	36	2.8%
Urban Development	27	6.1%	51	4.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>444</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>1,287</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Doctoral Programs*				
Aerospace Engineering	16	12.3%	27	10.1%
Chemical Engineering	4	3.1%	12	4.5%
Civil Engineering	12	9.2%	30	11.2%
Communication and Culture	19	14.6%	46	17.2%
Electrical and Computer Engineering	27	20.8%	64	23.9%
Environmental Applied Science and Management	2	1.5%	5	1.9%
Mechanical Engineering	35	26.9%	52	19.4%
Policy Studies	4	3.1%	9	3.4%

* Age (in years) as of November 1, 2009 based on reported date of birth.

Conclusions

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

Along with these strengths, a few aspects are being evaluated with a view to improvement. These include professional skills development, preparation for candidacy exams, and enriching experiences such as activities relating to presentations and publications.

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). Similarly, because a large number of new graduate programs have been introduced to the Ryerson mix since the previous iteration of the survey, comparisons between 2010 and 2007 results are not made in this report (with the exception of questions about general University services, which are likely not affected by program of study to the same extent as other survey items).

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. The results of the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) provide guidance with respect to priorities, and the CGPSS will continue to play a useful role in the evolution of graduate studies at Ryerson.