

# CANADIAN GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2016

## Highlights of Results

Prepared by the University Planning Office



## ***Introduction***

The Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) was conducted for the fourth time at Ryerson in 2016. 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 2,513 students were contacted, and 1,063 responded, yielding a response rate of 42 percent. Among Ryerson's respondents, 834 students (79 percent) were enrolled in master's programs, and 229 students (21 percent) were enrolled in doctoral programs.<sup>1</sup>

## ***General Satisfaction with the Ryerson Graduate Experience***

A number of survey items asks students to provide a general assessment of their experience at Ryerson. Results, summarized in Figures 1 and 2, are the same as or higher than those for Ontario universities overall. 89 percent of students report that their academic experience at Ryerson is "good," "very good" or "excellent." 83 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 78 percent would "probably" or "definitely" select the same faculty supervisor.

74 percent would "probably" or "definitely" select the same university if they were to start their graduate career again, and 79 percent would recommend the University to someone considering the same program. Master's students are more positive than doctoral students in this regard.

Some increases in levels of satisfaction are observed for 2016 as compared to the previous round of the survey, which was conducted in 2013. A higher proportion of students indicate that they would select Ryerson if they were to start their graduate career again. A higher proportion also indicate that they would recommend Ryerson to someone who was considering their program.

## ***Assessment of Academic Program***

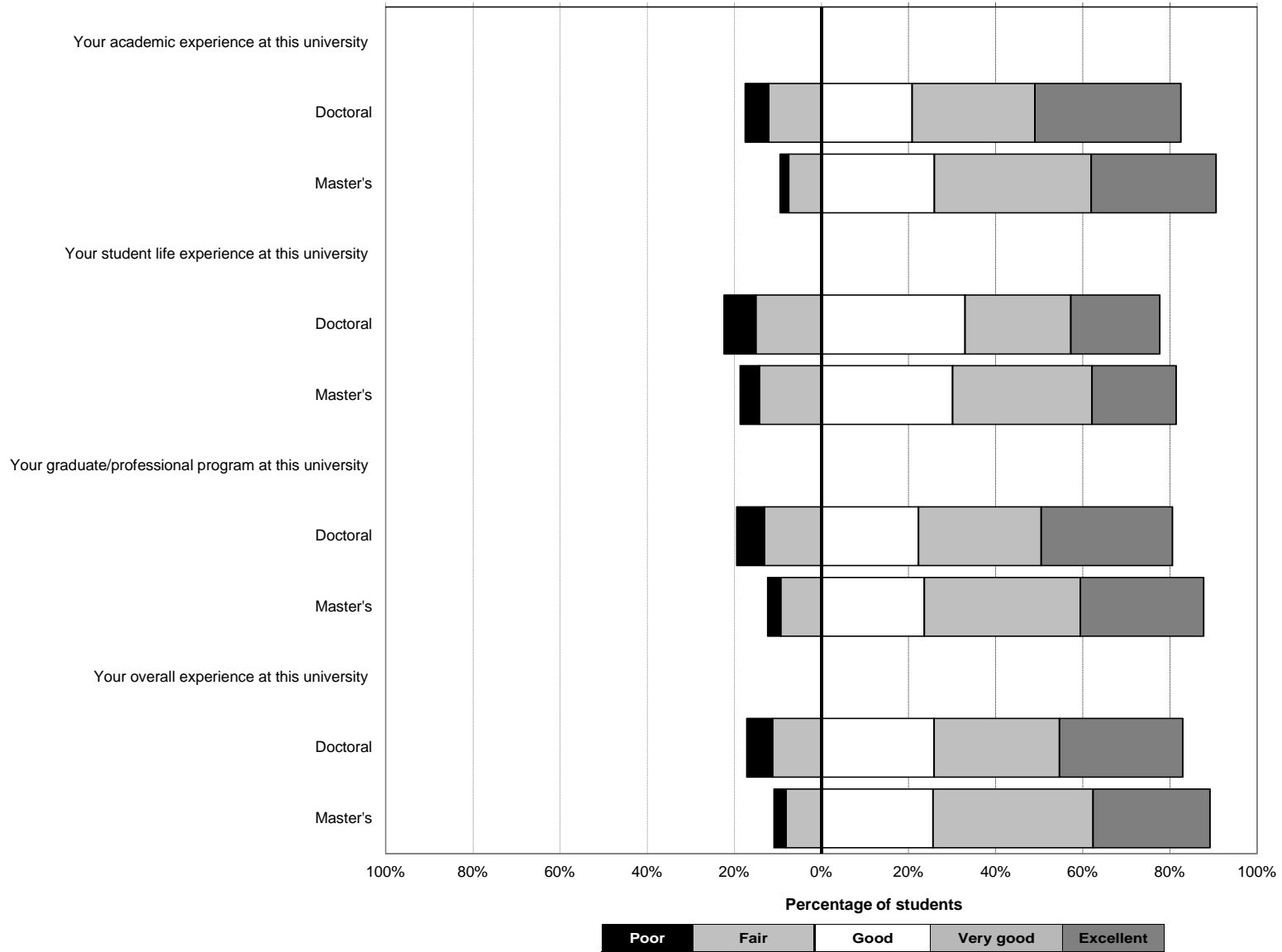
Students were asked to rate specific aspects of their program of study. Results, which tend to be similar to or higher than the Ontario average, are summarized in Figure 3.

90 percent of students report that the relationship between faculty and graduate students is "good," "very good" or "excellent" and 86 percent are likewise satisfied with the quality of graduate teaching by faculty. Similarly, 88 percent indicate that staff members in their program are helpful.

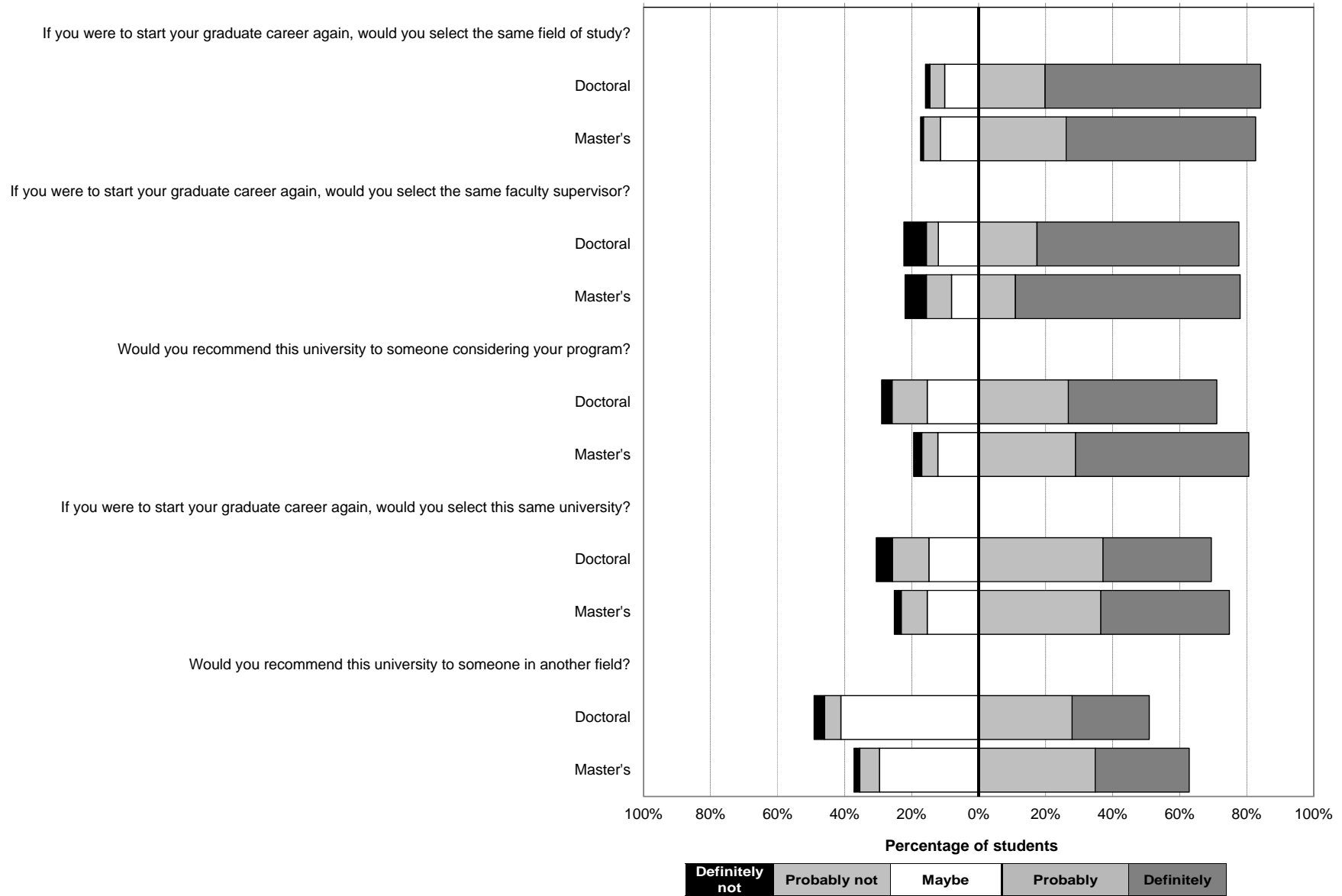
82 percent of respondents rate the relationship of program content to their research or professional goals as good (25%), very good (35%) or excellent (22%).

<sup>1</sup> Results are estimated to be accurate within 2.3 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 2.6 percentage points and for the doctoral group, 4.6 percentage points. (Sample size and response rate are taken into account when estimating the magnitude of error.)

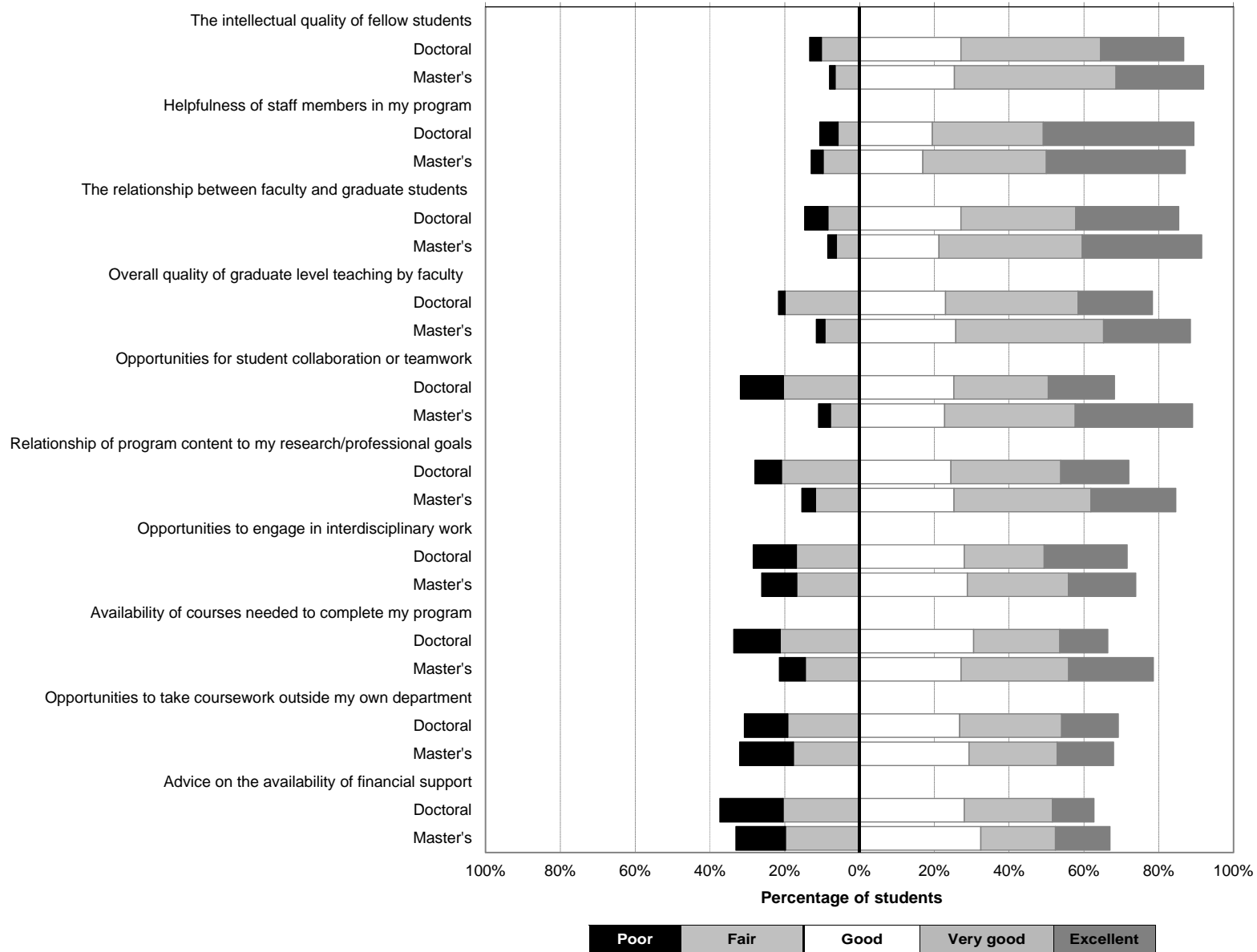
**Figure 1: Overall Assessment of Graduate Experience**



**Figure 2: General Satisfaction with Program**



**Figure 3: Assessment of Program**



Aspects that garner less positive responses include opportunities to take courses outside of one's home department (rated as at least good by 68 percent) and advice on the availability of financial support (rated as at least good by 66 percent). Despite the lower ratings relative to other questions, Ryerson students indicate similar or higher satisfaction with these aspects than the Ontario average.

Master's students tend to be more positive than doctoral students about some aspects of their program, namely opportunities for student collaboration or teamwork, availability of courses, and the relationship of program content to their research or professional goals.

Increases in satisfaction with course availability were noted at the master's level, as well as with opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary work when 2016 results are compared against those generated in 2013. For both items, reported satisfaction among master's students increased by 7 to 8 percentage points and remained relatively steady among the doctoral group.

Fourteen questions regarding students' dissertation advisors were posed. Reported satisfaction is high, with 91 percent of doctoral students reporting that overall, dissertation advisors performed their roles well. More than 90 percent of respondents indicate that dissertation advisors served as their advocate when needed, and that their advisor was available for regular meetings. 89 percent agree that advisors provided constructive feedback, and 87 percent indicate that advisors promoted their professional development. Career related discussions appear to be an exception: 76 percent of respondents agree that their advisor "encouraged discussions about the current job market and various career prospects." (This result is, nonetheless, higher than the average for Ontario universities.) Results, summarized in Figure 4, are generally similar to those at the Ontario level.

### ***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.

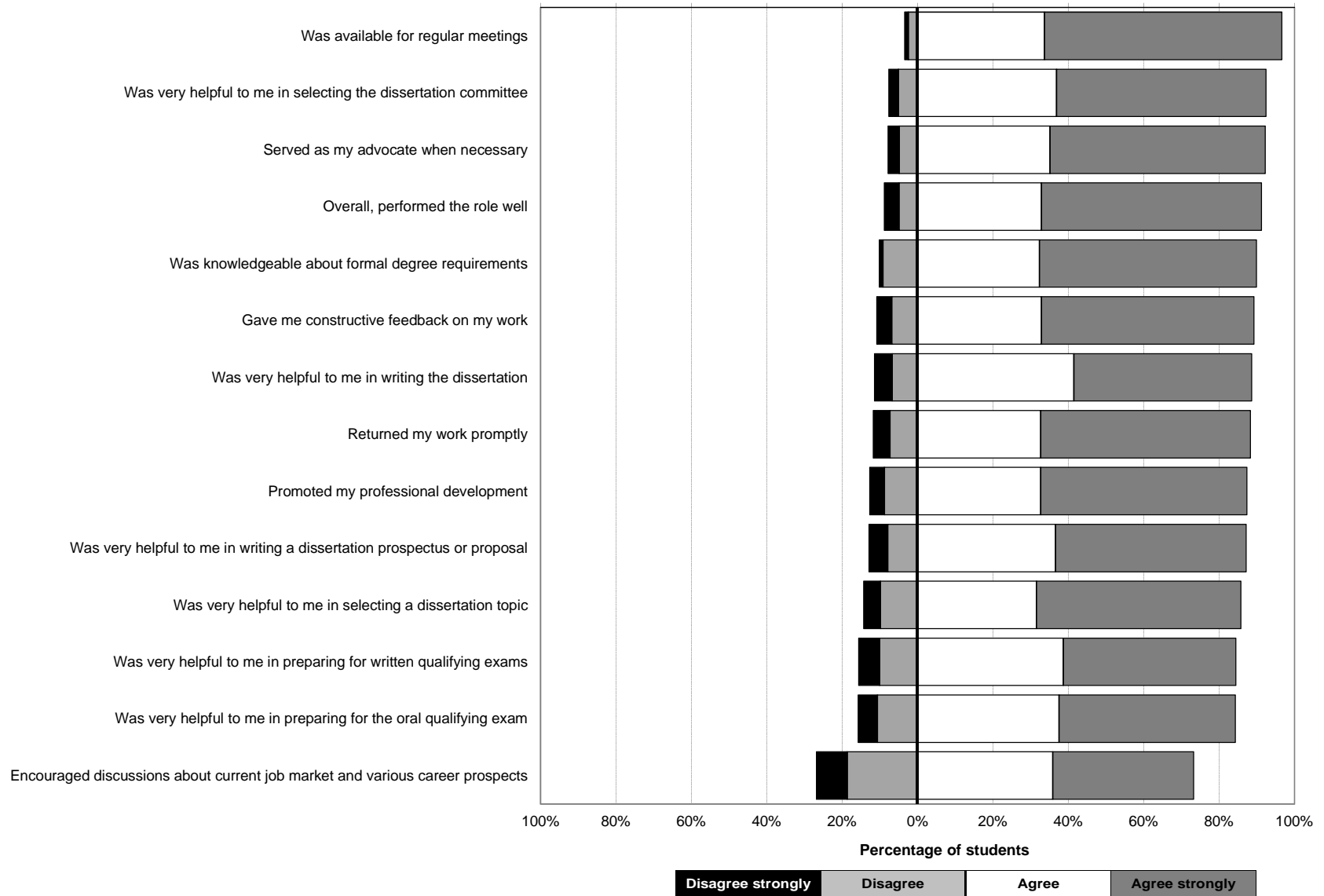
#### *Applied skills for research-focused master's and doctoral programs:*

Students are most satisfied with courses, workshops, and orientation on teaching, which are characterized as "good," "very good" or "excellent" by 88 percent of respondents. Similarly, 85 percent indicate satisfaction with feedback on their research.

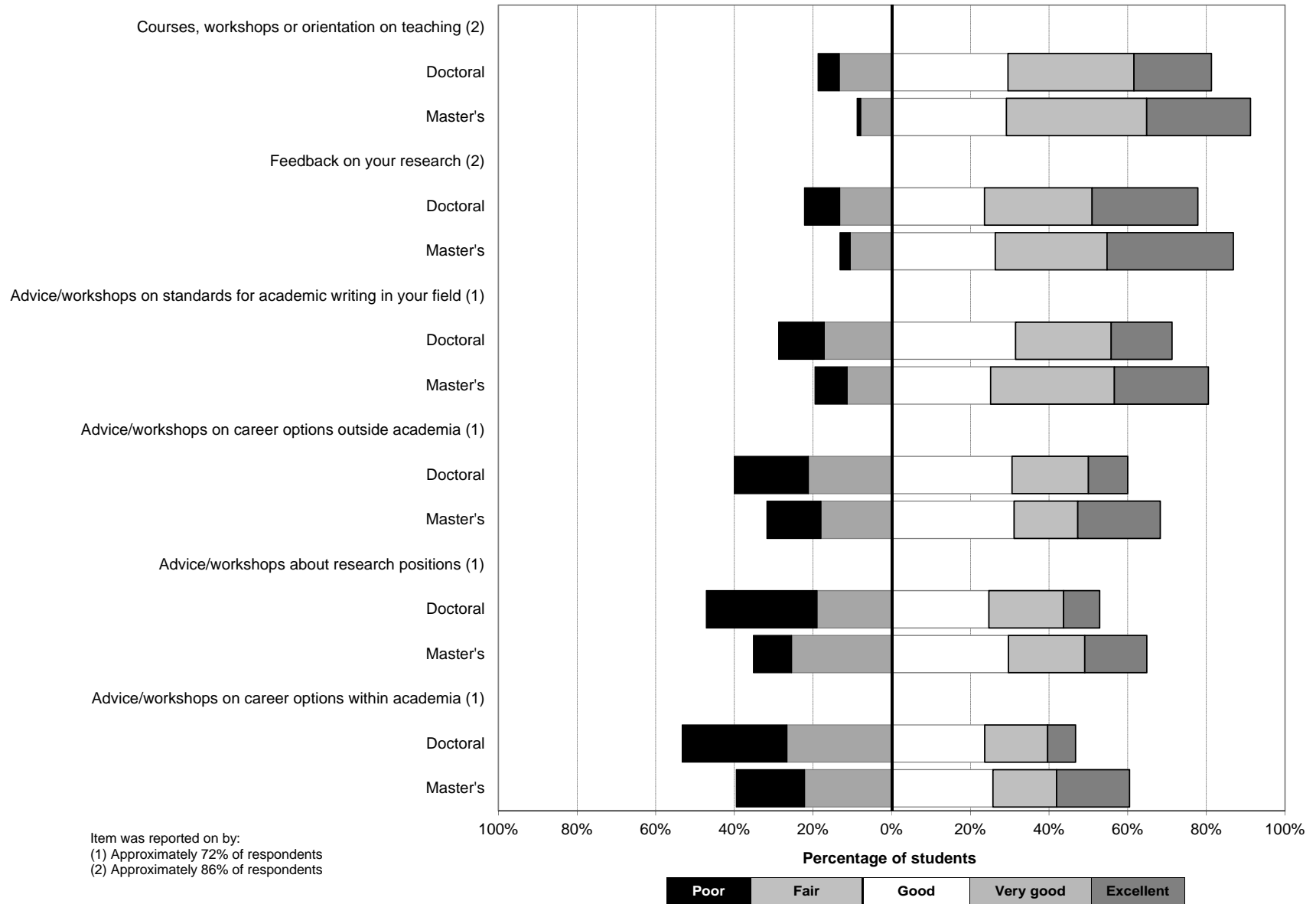
Responses related to career-related advice or workshops are the same for positions both inside and outside of academia: 71 percent of graduate students describe each of these, respectively, as "good," "very good" or "excellent." Results are summarized in Figure 5a.

For all items in this area, Ryerson's results are higher than the average for Ontario. In addition, results have increased over the 2013 iteration of the survey, particularly at the master's level. The highest increases are seen for advice about career options outside of academia and for academic writing

**Figure 4: Dissertation Advisors-Doctoral Students' Assessment**



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





standards. Advice about career options is rated positively by 60 percent of doctoral students (compared to 48 percent in 2013) and by 68 percent of master's students (compared to 50 percent in 2013). Advice about academic writing standards is rated positively by 71 percent of doctoral students (compared to 65 percent in 2013) and by 81 percent of master's students (compared to 67 percent in 2013).

#### *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 76 to 81 percent of respondents. Less positive are the ratings of advice/workshops on writing grant proposals (58 percent). Results tend to be similar to the Ontario average and are summarized in Figure 5b. Doctoral students' rating of advice or workshops on preparation for candidacy exams has increased, from 52 percent expressing satisfaction in 2013 to 63 percent in 2016.

#### *Applied skills in professionally-based master's programs:*

Over 80 percent of students in professionally-based master's programs report that advice or workshops on professional writing standards are "good," "very good" or "excellent." Similar results are reported for opportunities for contact with practicing professionals. Fewer students, roughly two-thirds, report similarly with respect to advice on career options. Results, which are consistent with the Ontario average, are summarized in Figure 5c. Significant increases across all items are seen in 2016 in comparison to the survey conducted in 2013. For example, the rating of opportunities for contact with professionals increased by 10 percentage points (from 71 percent providing a positive rating in 2013 to 80 percent in 2016) and the rating of advice or workshops on professional practice or job preparation increased from 58 percent in 2013 to 69 percent in 2016.

### ***University Services and Student Life***

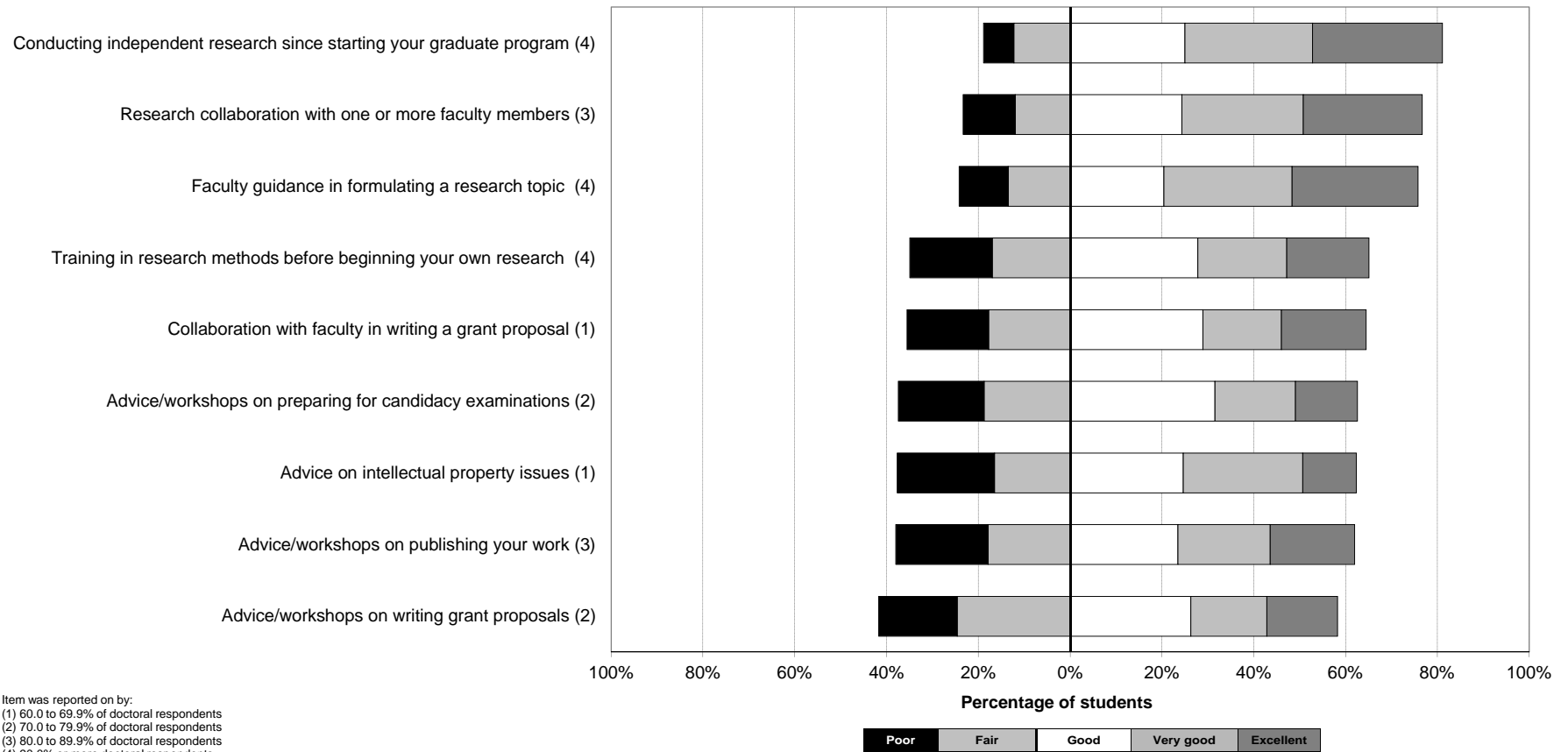
Respondents were asked to rate their experience over the past year with a variety of university services and resources. Results are summarized in Figure 6.

The most positive responses are for athletic facilities and library facilities, which 89 percent of students characterize as "good," "very good" or "excellent" (compared to about 80 percent in 2013). More than three-quarters of respondents express satisfaction with registrarial processes (77 percent) and graduate student work/study space (76 percent). These results also reflect a significant increase over the previous round of the survey, as they were rated positively by roughly 60 percent of respondents in 2013.

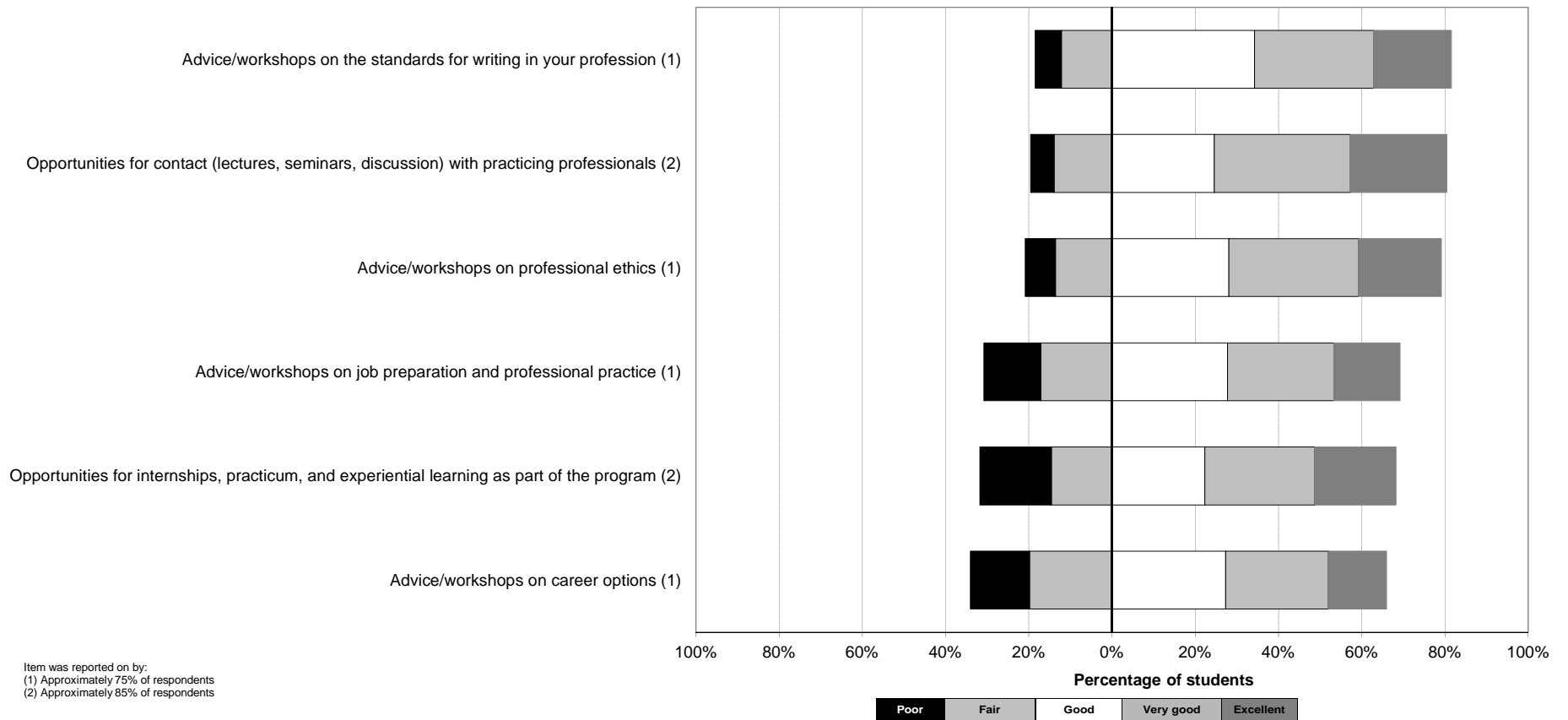
Relatively weaker results are found in the areas of food services, financial aid, career services, and housing assistance. However, satisfaction with all services listed increased markedly in 2016 over 2013 results. The largest increase is seen in the area of food services, which is rated positively by 64 percent of respondents (compared to 41 percent in 2013).

A number of differences are observed between satisfaction at Ryerson and Ontario-wide ratings. Ryerson scores somewhat higher than average for graduate student work/study space, athletic facilities, services for international students, and food services. The proportion of students providing positive responses for these items is between 6 and 9 percentage points higher than the Ontario average.

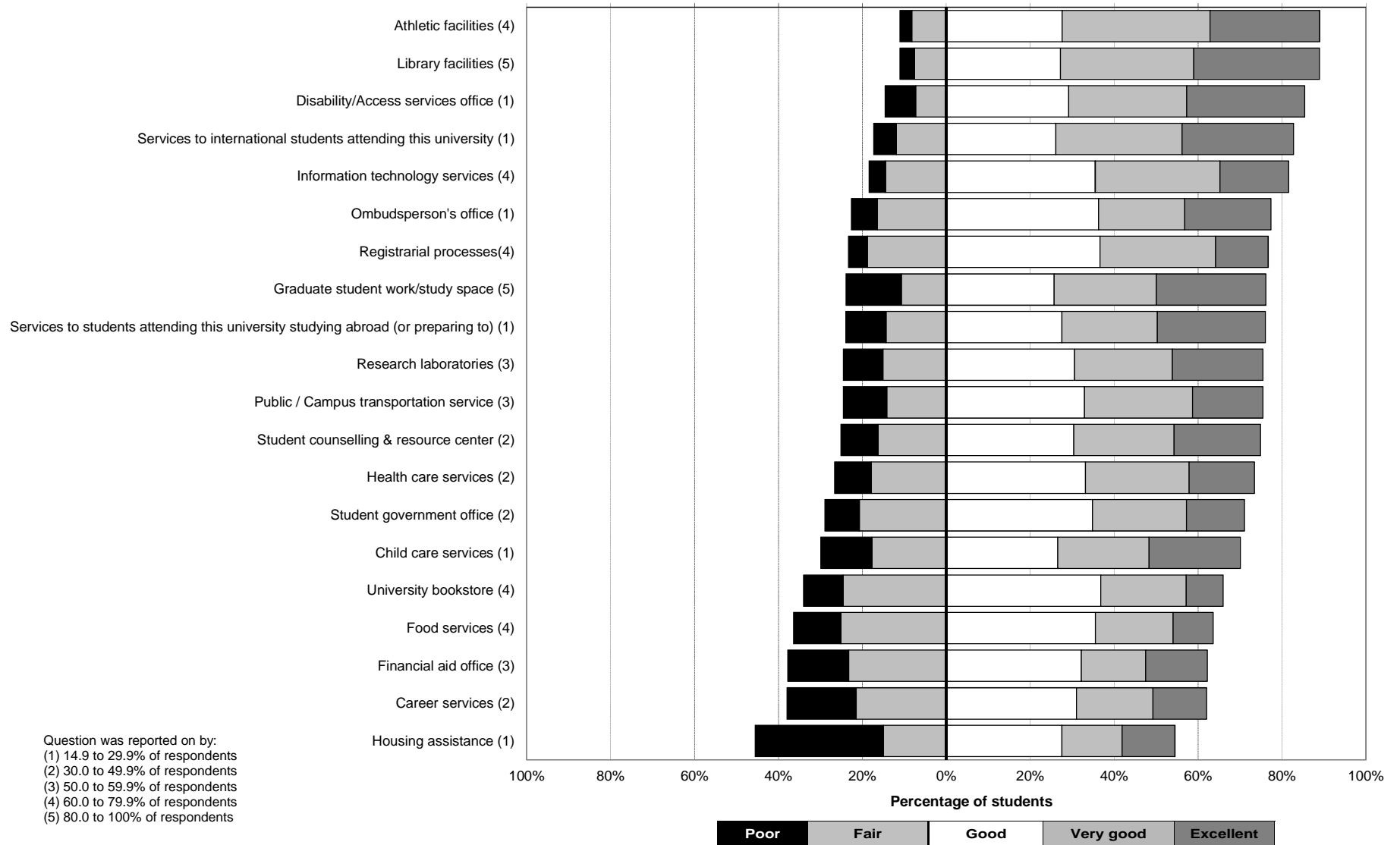
**Figure 5b: Research skills for doctoral students, rating of support received or opportunities provided**



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



**Figure 6: Resources and Student Life, Master's and Doctoral Students Combined**



Reported satisfaction with housing assistance, health care services, and the bookstore is somewhat lower at Ryerson than the Ontario average (by 6 to 8 percentage points).

### ***Publications and Presentations***

Respondents were asked about the prevalence of various activities relating to publications and presentations in their departments. Types of activities include attendance at scholarly meetings, publishing, and presentation of research. Results are presented separately for doctoral students and master's students in research-focused programs in Figure 7. (Master's students in professionally-oriented programs did not provide information about publications and presentations.)

The most frequent activity among both master's and doctoral students is seminars and colloquia at which students present their research. Two thirds of master's students and 87 percent of doctoral students indicate that this occurs in their department.

The least common activities reported by master's students are attending national scholarly meetings and publishing as a sole or first author in a refereed journal: 27 to 29 percent indicate that this occurs in their department. For doctoral students, the least common activity reported is attendance at national scholarly meetings: 52 percent report that this occurs in their department.

Responses from doctoral students in 2016 with respect to publications and presentations are roughly consistent with 2013 results. Among master's students, there was a decline in the proportion of students indicating that seminars and colloquia occur in their department for students to present their research. (75 percent reported that this occurred in 2013, and 65 percent reported similarly in 2016.)

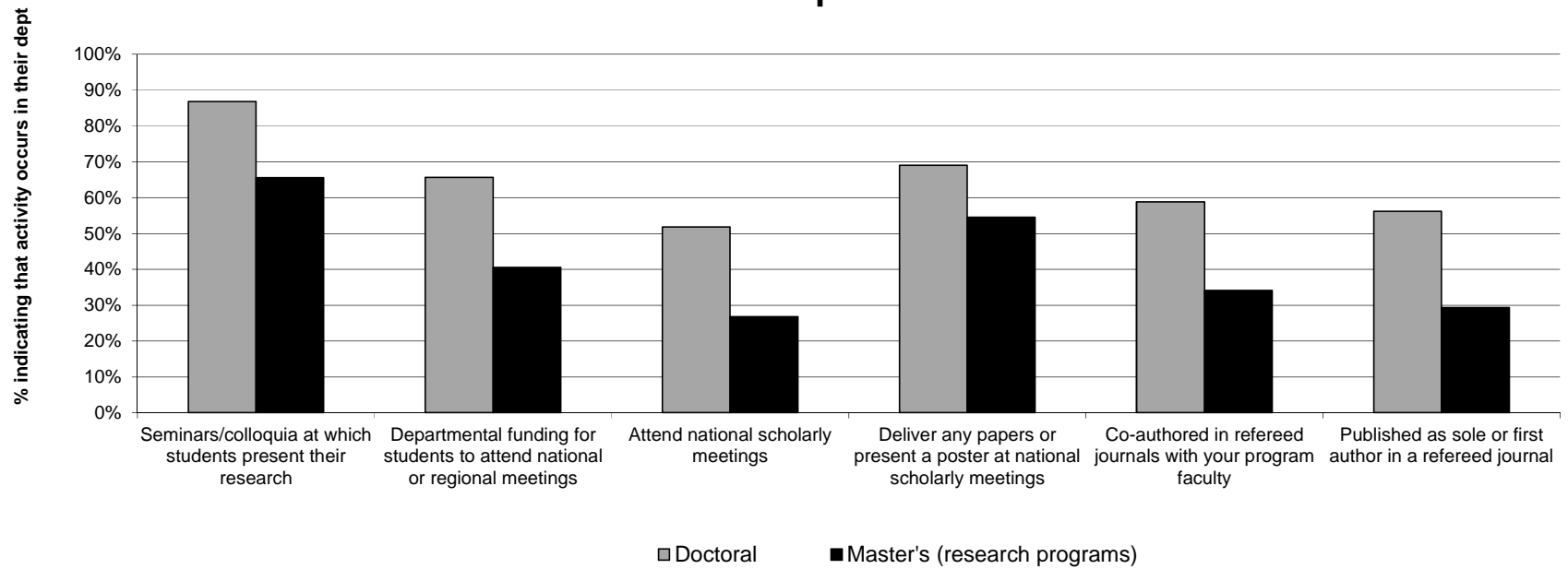
The reported prevalence of publications and presentation-related activities is, for the most part, lower at Ryerson than the provincial average. In particular, students at Ryerson are significantly less likely than those province-wide to report that attending national scholarly meetings occurs in their 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. 43 percent of Ryerson respondents report that this is a "minor" obstacle and a further 35 percent indicate that it is a "major" obstacle. Between 42 and 45 percent of Ryerson students indicate that course scheduling, and program structure or requirements, respectively, pose obstacles to their progress. A little over half report that family obligations pose 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 68 percent. (When one includes only international students, immigration laws and regulations are named as either a minor or major obstacle by more than half of respondents.) Results are very similar to those at other Ontario universities and are roughly consistent with results from the previous round of the survey conducted in 2013.

**Figure 7: Publications and Presentations among Students in their Academic Departments**



Master's and doctoral students are fairly similar in terms of the proportion facing various obstacles, although master's students are more likely than doctoral students to indicate course scheduling issues (46 percent at the master's level and 29 percent among the doctoral group).

### ***Education Financing***

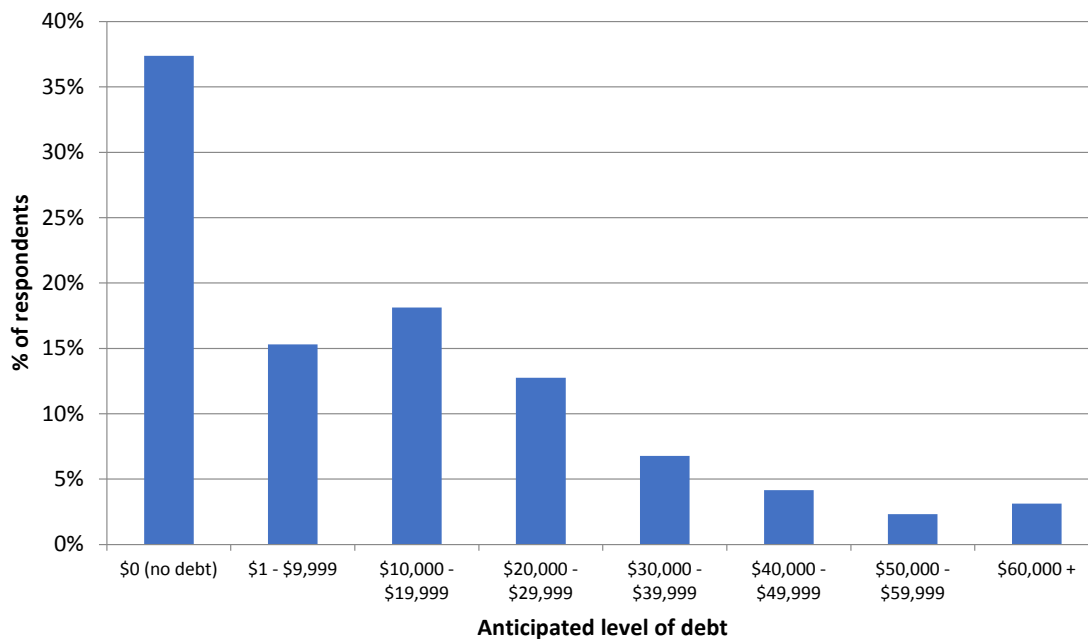
Respondents were asked to indicate what forms of financial support they received while enrolled in their program of study. Among master's students, the most common source of financial support is loans, savings, or family assistance, identified by 55 percent of respondents, followed by teaching assistantships, cited by 39 percent. The most commonly cited sources of financial support among doctoral students are teaching assistantships, cited by 72 percent of respondents, followed by research assistantships, identified by 50 percent.

A higher proportion of Ryerson doctoral students have a provincial government scholarship than the Ontario average. A higher proportion also report having university-funded fellowships than average. The proportion of doctoral students who receive full tuition scholarships or waivers is lower at Ryerson than province-wide.

At the master's level, a higher percentage of students at Ryerson report receiving university-funded fellowships as well as provincial government scholarships than the provincial average. A lower percentage of Ryerson master's students report receiving university-funded bursaries than the Ontario-wide group.

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 is relatively consistent with that reported in 2013 and appears in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Graduate debt levels predicted by respondents  
(n=987)**



### ***Social Life***

86 percent of respondents report that organized social activities are held within their department occasionally or frequently. Among these students, 80 percent report that they actually attend these activities.

A lower number, 59 percent, report that organized social activities are held with their advisor or research group, but 82 percent of these students participate in activities when they are held.

### ***Profile of Respondents***

The profile of respondents at Ryerson is somewhat different from that of other Ontario universities, and this is likely related to Ryerson's program mix. First, graduate students at Ryerson tend to be somewhat older than the Ontario average. 36 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, 48 percent of Ryerson respondents are female. This is roughly representative of the actual graduate student population at Ryerson; in 2016-17, 50 percent of graduate students were female. Finally, the proportion of graduate students in doctoral programs is lower at Ryerson than province-wide.

The program mix of respondents roughly mirrors that of the actual graduate population at Ryerson.



**Conclusion**

Assessments provided by Ryerson graduate students are, generally, very positive. The significant increases in positive ratings across so many dimensions of the graduate experience are encouraging and reflect the evolution of graduate education at Ryerson. Examples of areas demonstrating improvement include general assessments of academic programs, activities aimed at skills development, and a range of university services.

Along with these strengths, a few aspects are identified that may require further follow-up and possible enhancement. These might include enriching activities relating to presentations and publications, as well as further examination of the differences between master's and doctoral respondents in terms of their responses.

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).

Since the introduction of graduate studies at Ryerson in 2000, the number and breadth of programs offered has increased substantially. The Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey provides a means of highlighting the university's strengths, identifying areas for improvement, and documenting the evolution of graduate education at Ryerson.