# Reviewing Graduate Admissions Processes

**Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Decolonization in Graduate Studies: Focus on Graduate Admissions Processes**

<u>Introduction to Admissions Reflection Exercise</u>

***Why are we asking Graduate Programs to reflect on their admissions processes?***

Western's Strategic Plan, Towards Western at 150, states: "Of all the aspirations voiced by the Western community through this planning process, the expectation of a more inclusive Western stood out, and progress toward this goal will be foundational to our success in reaching the other goals articulated in the plan."

"Evolving as a university also means learning from our past. Creating a more welcoming and inclusive experience, particularly for people of colour, and Indigenous Peoples, will be critical."

Achieving and supporting a diverse graduate community begins with admissions processes that support equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization (EDIAD).

As part of Western's and SGPS's commitment to ensure that our graduate admission processes and practices support our commitment to EDIAD, we are taking some important steps that require your support and engagement:

- SGPS is working with Dr. Christy Bressette (Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President, Indigenous Initiatives) and Dr. Opiyo Oloya (Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion) to include a brief, voluntary self-identification optional equity questionnaire in the application for graduate admissions. This will enable us to gather self-reported demographic information about our applicants to help us better understand who is applying to our programs and to enable more wholistic review of applicants, taking into account the whole individual in the application process rather than focusing on only specific characteristics.
- We are asking graduate programs to reflect on and critically appraise their own admission practices to identify opportunities to increase equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization in their review of applicants and in their graduate admissions.
- SGPS is working with Drs. Bressette and Oloya, as well as other campus partners, to develop workshops for graduate program Chairs and Admissions Committees to learn how to effectively use demographic information in wholistic reviews, how to increase representation from equity-deserving groups in our graduate programs, and how to support the success of equity-deserving students in our graduate programs. Specifically, admission practices should aim to increase admission of Black and Indigenous candidates. Our goal is to support our Graduate Programs in moving toward a more inclusive Western, recognizing that our admissions processes play a critical role in

achieving our shared goal of *a more inclusive Western*. Programs will continue to have autonomy in admission decisions; we are merely striving to provide Graduate Programs with the information, knowledge, and resources to ensure that admissions decisions are supported by an equity lens.

As a result of this exercise, we anticipate that the 2022/23 admission cycle will involve more wholistic and therefore inclusive admission processes, leading directly to an intake of more Indigenous and Black graduate students and a more overall diverse graduate student intake.

Your Associate Dean - Graduate will guide this process for your faculty and share the synthesis of these findings with SGPS, the Associate Deans - Graduate group, and the AVP/VP Indigenous Initiatives and AVP EDI. Collectively, we will identify and develop the supports needed to affect change.

### *What are we asking Graduate Programs to do?*
We ask that all Graduate Programs review the [Graduate Applicant Review Guide](#), complete the following EDIAD reflection exercise, and share their responses and feedback with SGPS.

The purpose of the reflection exercise is:
- to prompt you to reflect on your current practices and identify unconscious biases.
- to assist you in moving toward a wholistic review process.
- to assist SGPS by providing information and feedback that will enable us to support programs in moving toward wholistic review processes.

The information you provide will guide SGPS and our campus partners in the creation of workshops, tools, and resources to support more equitable and inclusive graduate admissions.

**Step 1.** Prior to completing the EDIAD reflection exercise, please review the [Graduate Applicant Review Guide](#), which provides an overview of common biases.
**Step 2.** In collaboration with your Graduate Program Committee and/or Admissions Committee, and/or Associate Dean - Graduate, please complete the following EDIAD Reflection Exercise.

It is not necessary to do this exercise separately for multiple graduate programs (such as Master's and PhD) that follow the same admissions processes.

# EDIAD Reflection Exercise

Graduate Program(s) and Degree(s):

_____

All graduate student applications are available for review by both the graduate program and SGPS from the point at which an applicant begins their application. Once an applicant submits a completed application to a graduate program, SGPS calculates an admission average and identifies any conditions to be met upon formal admission (e.g., provision of study permit for international applicants, official transcripts).

As part of the SGPS process, some programs instruct SGPS to triage applicants. For example, some programs request prioritization of particular types of applicants.

Do you instruct SGPS to triage your applicants (ie, to prioritize particular applicants)?

○ Yes

○ No

What applicants do you prioritize?
_____

Why do you prioritize these applicants?

---

What unconscious biases may be implicated by this prioritization?
_____

Does your program have an admissions committee?

○ Yes

○ No

How many people are on the admissions committee?
_____

Does the admissions committee have criteria for its membership?

○ Yes

○ No

Do you have Terms of Reference for the admissions committee?

&#9711; Yes

&#9711; No

Does the admissions committee make final decisions regarding admissions decisions?

&#9711; Yes

&#9711; No

Does your admissions committee include a member(s) with EDIAD expertise?

&#9711; Yes

&#9711; No

&#9711; Sometimes

Does your admissions committee/process ensure confidentiality of applicant information?

&#9711; Yes

&#9711; No

&#9711; Sometimes

What unconscious biases may be implicated by the features of your admissions committee?
_____

Who is responsible for making admission decisions?
_____

How are those responsible for making admission decisions determined?
_____

Does your process for making admission decisions include someone with EDIAD expertise?

&#9711; Yes

&#9711; No

&#9711; Sometimes

An applicant's academic record comprises a substantial part of the admission application.  It conveys information such as: grades, institution(s) attended, leaves of absence, time to complete previous degrees, interruptions to academic path.  How does your admissions

committee/process use this information?  What unconscious biases may be inherent in this information?

How much importance is given to this information?

| | None at all | A little | A moderate amount | A lot | Variable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grades | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Institution(s) attended | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Time to complete previous degree(s) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Leaves of absence | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Interruptions to academic path | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

How is this information used in ranking applicants?

○ Grades _____

○ Institution(s) attended _____

○ Time to complete previous degree(s)_____

○ Leaves of absence _____

○ Interruptions to academic path _____

○ Other (if provided on previous page) _____

○ Other (if provided on previous page) _____

○ Other (if provided on previous page) _____

Identify any unconscious biases that may be inherent in this information

○ Grades _____

○ Institution(s) attended _____

○ Time to complete previous degree(s) _____

○ Leaves of absence _____

○ Interruptions to academic path_____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

In addition to academic record, our current graduate applications gather information such as: citizenship, referee identity/reputation, ratings and comments, awards/scholarships, English language proficiency scores, and statements of interest.  Some programs also include program-specific information (such as standardized test scores), and/or interviews.  Admissions committee/processes use these indicators to identify the strongest applicants in their applicant pool.  How does your admissions committee/process use this information?  What unconscious biases may be inherent in this information?

How much importance is given to this information?

| | None at all | A little | A moderate amount | A lot | Variable | Not Applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Citizenship | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Reference letters/evaluations | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Referee identity/reputation | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Awards/scholarships | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| English Language Proficiency | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Standardized Test Scores (eg, GRE, CASPer) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Statement of Interest | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Personal Statement (eg, relational positionality within self-identification) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Interview | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

How is this information used in ranking applicants?

○ Citizenship _____

○ Reference letters/evaluations_____

○ Referee identity/reputation_____

○ Awards/scholarships_____

○ English Language Proficiency_____

○ Standardized Test Scores (eg, GRE, CASPer)_____

○ Statement of Interest_____

○ Personal Statement (eg, relational positionality within self-identification)_____

○ Interview _____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (if provided on previous page)_____

Identify any <u>unconscious biases</u> that may be inherent in this information

○ Citizenship _____

○ Reference letters/evaluations_____

○ Referee identity/reputation_____

○ Awards/scholarships_____

○ English Language Proficiency_____

○ Standardized Test Scores (eg, GRE, CASPer)_____

○ Statement of Interest _____

○ Personal Statement (eg, relational positionality within self-identification)_____

○ Interview_____

○ Other (as provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (as provided on previous page)_____

○ Other (as provided on previous page)_____

The admissions process in some graduate programs includes input from faculty members who have been identified as likely supervisors for individuals who have applied.

Does your program's admission process include supervisor input or considerations?

○ Yes

○ No

What is the supervisor's role in admissions decisions?
_____

What happens if a qualified applicant's admission is not supported by the supervisor?
_____

What happens when a supervisor evaluates an applicant very positively, but does not have the capacity to take on supervisory responsibility for the individual?
_____

What unconscious biases may be implicated in supervisor input to admissions?
_____

How does supervisor input into admission decisions affect the diversity of your graduate admissions?

○ It increases the diversity of our admissions. Please explain how it increases the diversity:
_____

○ It decreases the diversity of our admissions. Please explain how it decreases the diversity: _____

○ It doesn't affect the diversity of our admissions.

○ We don't know if or how it affects the diversity of our admissions.

How does supervisor input strengthen your admission decisions from an EDIAD perspective?
_____

How might supervisor input bias your admission decisions from an EDIAD perspective?
_____

Please feel free to share other observations or perspectives about the value and/or risk of supervisor input into admission decisions?
_____

SGPS is collaborating with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and the Associate Vice-President, EDI to include optional questions on the graduate admissions application related to the EDIAD characteristics of your applicants, including: gender, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, racial group, and disability. The questions and response options are available [here](here).

To help us identify how to best support programs in using this information effectively and how to best support the students that programs admit, please consider:

How could your program use this information in admission decisions?
_____

What other efforts are available in your program to support EDIAD?
_____

What support or guidance would your program need or want to optimize the effective use of this information?
_____

Do you currently have dedicated EDIAD enrolment spots?

○ Yes

○ No

Would your program be interested in setting EDIAD admission targets?

○ Yes

○ No

What support would you need to achieve this?
_____

Please share your reflections on the following:

What guidelines or practices do you have regarding the number of graduate students a faculty member can supervise?
_____

What are the strengths of your program's current admission processes?
_____

How effective are your current admissions processes in identifying students who complete the program in a timely manner?
_____

How effective are your current admissions processes in admitting a diverse range of students?
_____

What are the areas where you see opportunity for improvement in your admission processes?
_____

Does your current admissions process support EDIAD?

○ Yes

○ No

How is EDIAD supported?
_____

What are the barriers?
_____

Would you describe your admission practices as wholistic?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Somewhat

○ Don't know

What do you include in your wholistic review?
_____

How can your Faculty and SGPS support you in making your admissions practices a more equitable, diverse, inclusive, accessible, and decolonized process?

○ Faculty: _____

○ SGPS: _____

Your Email Address (a copy of your responses will be sent to you via email)
_____

Your Associate Dean-Graduate Email Address (a copy of your responses will be shared with your Associate Dean-Graduate via email)

Brescia University College - jseabro2@uwo.ca
Don Wright Faculty of Music - kmooney@uwo.ca
Faculty of Arts and Humanities - nbhatia2@uwo.ca
Faculty of Education - inamukas@uwo.ca
Faculty of Engineering - ksiddiq@uwo.ca
Faculty of Health Sciences - lmurra57@uwo.ca
Faculty of Information & Media Studies - pam.mckenzie@uwo.ca
Faculty of Law - abottere@uwo.ca
Faculty of Science - jjin@uwo.ca
Faculty of Social Science - jbaxter6@uwo.ca
Huron University College - smcclat2@uwo.ca
Ivey Business School - lpurdy@uwo.ca
King's University College - pdonahu@uwo.ca
Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry - tadrysda@uwo.ca