

Guidance on Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Admissions

Guiding Principles

Transparency in assessment indicators and admission practices

Innovation and Change in the pursuit of continued enhancement

Self-Reflection and the **Willingness** to recognize potential biases in our practices

Diversity, Community, and Belonging in creating welcoming spaces for all

Academic Integrity and Fairness fundamental to academic success and well-being

STAGE 1

STEP 1

- Commit to enhancing your admission processes
- Explore Inclusive Excellence Guidance and start implementing recommendations
- Encourage faculty and staff to participate in the EDIDA trainings on positionality and bias
- Participate in Inclusive Excellence Conversation Series

STEP 2

- Reflect on how to enhance diversity in your program and admission committee
- Identify attributes of successful graduate students
- Participate in additional EDIDA workshops
- Participate in Inclusive Excellence Conversation Series

STEP 3

- Participate in CTL session on assessment rubrics
- Revise reference letter templates
- Consider additional application requirements, like narrative CVs and personal statements
- Participate in Inclusive Excellence Conversation Series

STEP 4

- Implement your assessment rubrics
- Explore Inclusive Excellence Guidance — Stage 2 (coming soon)
- Revise application for 2025/26 admission cycle



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INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE IN GRADUATE ADMISSIONS

The recruitment and admission landscape for graduate students has become increasingly competitive over the past decade. Universities across the globe are implementing innovative approaches to graduate admission processes in an effort to optimize the admission of the strongest students.

We have created this guidance document to inform you of these innovative practices currently in place in top Universities. Our goal is to support your efforts to more accurately identify the most talented prospective students through an inclusive excellence approach.

The imperative for inclusive excellence involves the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to sovereignty. SGPS is committed to having these rights reflected in our mandate, and in policies and procedures that govern graduate education and postdoctoral studies at Western ([EDIAD and Indigenization in Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Studies](#)).

The imperative for inclusive excellence is celebrated in Western's EDIDA Strategic Plan:

- Diverse Representation and Engagement
- Inclusive Excellence in Learning and Teaching
- Inclusive Excellence in Research and Innovation
- Safe, Accessible, and Inclusive Spaces, Places, and Experiences
- System-wide Capacity Building and Cultural Change

In the EDIDA Strategic Plan, 'Advancing Inclusive Excellence, is a call to action' for members of the Western community. SGPS supports this call for action by actively promoting and fostering inclusive excellence (i.e., inclusive, equitable, and accessible learning and research, embedded into the principles of indigenization and decolonization) in all components of graduate education and postdoctoral training, from recruitment through to completion.

Below we discuss how to achieve "diverse representation and engagement" in your programs through your admission processes (Priority Area of Strategic Focus: *Western EDIDA Strategic Plan*). In addition to enhancing your admission practices, these practices will help to reduce barriers and create academic, research, scholarship, and creative spaces for all students

Audience

The guidance has been written to inform and support graduate program leadership, admission committees, graduate assistants, and faculty members as they continually enhance their admission processes.

Guiding Principles

- **Transparency** in assessment indicators and admission practices
- **Self-Reflection** and the **Willingness** to recognize potential biases in our practices
- **Innovation** and **Change** in the pursuit of continued enhancement
- **Diversity, Community, and Belonging** in creating welcoming spaces for all
- **Academic Integrity** and **Fairness** fundamental to academic success and wellbeing

October 2024

Acknowledgements

The initiative represents a collaborative partnership between SGPS and the Offices of Indigenous Initiatives, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Academic Programs, Western International, Research Western, Student Experience, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the Society of Graduate Students. The work has benefited from the feedback from these units and from numerous members of the graduate community, including SGPS leadership and staff, and members of the SGPS EDIAD Working Group.

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OVERVIEW

“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.”

[Towards Western at 150](#)

Universities across the globe are implementing innovative approaches to graduate and undergraduate admission processes to broaden and diversify their application pools, to more accurately identify the most talented prospective students from their application pools. This is most often referred to as a move towards ‘holistic’ admissions. Although an agreed upon definition for this term currently does not exist, the Council of Graduate Schools describes holistic admissions as a set of processes that enable the consideration of an applicant’s academic qualifications alongside their “noncognitive’ or personal attributes” ([Council of Graduate Schools](#) iii).

Using this approach maximizes an ***inclusive excellence*** approach to the recruitment of graduate students:

1. Each component of the application file is reviewed and then considered collectively. This is often referred to as a ‘full-file review.’
2. Prior academic achievements, test scores, grades, previous institution, are considered within the context of an applicant’s personal attributes/traits and professional or other relevant experiences.
3. Additional elements are included in application requirements, for example, a revised “holistic” letter of reference (see [Appendix 5](#)) or interviews that better capture the characteristics and abilities of the applicant that are crucial to academic success (see [Appendix 6](#)).

Moving towards a graduate admission process that ***prioritizes inclusive excellence*** is a recognized, evidence-based way to identify the most talented prospective students from an application pool.

We recognize that program capacity to make changes to their application and assessment process varies, depending upon available resources and time. Tangible, small steps can have a significant impact on how you identify strong applicants who you may have otherwise missed. And indeed, you may find that many of your current processes already embrace principles and practices that align with an inclusive excellence approach.

An advantage of moving towards inclusive excellence admissions process is that it broadens and diversifies the pool of promising applicants. Julie Posselt demonstrates, through firsthand interviews and observations of admissions committees, that a broader and more encompassing understanding of academic merit will lead admission committees to identify high potential

applicants that may be traditionally excluded. In this way, it will significantly increase the diversity of applicants and students thereby benefiting all members of your department by enhancing your graduate programs ([Toward Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Education](#)).

Below we introduce you to the recognized best practices which inform our guidance around enhancing your admission processes. We then identify key steps that you can consider taking to move towards inclusive excellence in graduate admissions. We encourage you to consider adapting these steps to suit your specific program needs and your program design. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to admissions; for example, some programs are inherently research-team focused, while others are based on a solitary scholar model. Some rely heavily on international students while others tend to recruit locally. These factors impact your admission practices, and the enhancement you make to attract the strongest students from your applicant pool.

For further review of literature on inclusive (holistic) admission process, you can find an interesting and informative webinar about holistic admission practices across a number of US programs at: [A Look at Holistic Admissions](#) . *Kira Talent*, a world class holistic admissions solutions provider, offers a comprehensive and research-based [guide to holistic admissions](#) that could serve as a good starting point into holistic admissions. And the *Equity in Doctoral Education through Partnership and Innovation* (a UK project funded for Students and Research England to diversity research culture and community) also offers [this systematic and adaptable framework](#) that can be used to support the inclusive admissions processes.

Indigenous Perspectives on Inclusive Admissions

Holistic admission practices do not often take into consideration Indigenous worldviews and ways of doing, knowing, and being. We begin this document with an overview of the concept of holism from Indigenous perspectives because understanding and acknowledging the concept of holism and its relevance to Indigenous peoples and communities is central to considering Indigenous applicants, and to supporting Indigenous students to thrive. We recommend that you further learn about Indigenous world views, drawing on this knowledge to support your Indigenous applicants and students.

With this in mind, we then draw on best practices and literature that lead the holistic admission space. Considering both approaches to inclusive excellence will enhance your admissions practices and foster a diverse community of graduate students to enrich your program.

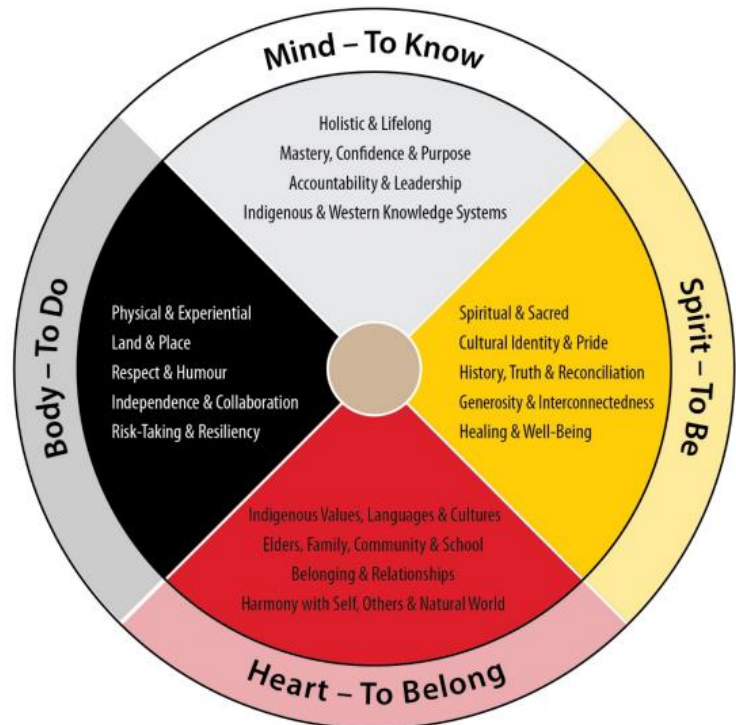
From Indigenous perspectives in Turtle Island, ideas behind “holistic” practices (also known as “wholistic”) are related to the teachings from the Medicine Wheel, for instance, as depicted by Kaaren Dannenmann of the Whitefish clan from Trout Lake.



Watch: [Medicine Wheel Teaching by Kaaren Dannemann](#)

The Wheels, fluidly differing from one Indigenous community to another, shows an integration and a balance of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. It is an important way to understand the concept of inclusive excellence, which takes into account different types of scholarship, ways of knowing, and ways of being.

And viewing excellence in this dynamic way enables you to measure an applicant based on the sum of all they bring and represent.



[Indigenous Education: Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework](#)

The holistic approach as shown in the Medicine Wheel is a reminder that individual aspects are irrevocably connected to the whole, as the individual is connected to the community. It emphasizes the connection between education and wellbeing, and the role of community and

Elders in promoting lifelong learning. It highlights the relevance of land-based and community-based learning as well as integration within one's community and encourages collaborations *between the Institution (Western University) and Indigenous communities, scholars, and knowledge keepers* ([Towards Western at 150: An Anishinaabe Framework for Indigenous Education](#); [Indigenous Education Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework](#), [The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach To Measuring Success](#)).

Indigenous peoples in Canada face unique and undue difficulties caused by settler colonization in Turtle Island ([Kathy Absolon: Indigenous Wholistic Theory](#)). Inclusive admission processes can be used as direct, tangible, and active ways of indigenization and decolonization. Reviewing applicants through inclusive frameworks that recognize, understand, and incorporate the Indigenous concept of holism will provide opportunities for applicants who self-identify as Indigenous to be considered for admissions through inclusive excellence approaches.

At Western, the holistic practice will support how programs create and use Indigenous admission pathways to identify and reduce specific difficulties and barriers that Indigenous applicants encounter. Some programs already have Indigenous pathways to admissions (see [Appendix 3: Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#)). You can collaborate with us as well as the Office of Indigenous Initiatives in creating relevant pathways for applicants who identify as Indigenous in Turtle Island.

To recapitulate, fueled by the desire to attract and retain the strongest students within a global world, the landscape of graduate admissions is changing. This guidance document has been written to introduce you to these emerging best practices admissions processes, which come with challenges and benefits. Consistent with EDIAD-I principles, the recommendations we make as well as the proposed timeline are informed by feedback from programs and members of the Western community.

A key goal is to change the deficit narratives around communities typically viewed under such lens to showcase their strengths and (potential) contributions ([The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach To Measuring Success](#)). Rather than “cutting-off” applicants as is done under traditional metrics, inclusive practices, as we show here, help admission committees to devise “screening-in” criteria to make the admission process more comprehensive ([Kira Talent](#); [Virginia Tech Graduate School](#)).

The result of reducing barriers to admission while maintaining our admission standards of excellence will be a more diverse graduate program.

Having a **diverse graduate student body**:

- Brings valuable experiences, talents, and perspectives, each of which enhances research and learning.
- Improves scholarly impact of research.
- Prepares students to engage in an increasingly diverse society, workforce, and education system.
- Promotes inclusivity and openness to different perspectives and knowledges.
- Encourages cultural sensitivity, self-reflection, empathy, and intercultural listening and communication skills.
 - Inside Higher Education: [Considering the Whole Student](#)
 - Jeffrey Deckman: [Three Forms of Excellence Leaders Must Recognize](#)
 - Julie Posselt: [Toward Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Education](#)
 - Robert Sternberg: [Rethinking What We Mean by Intelligence](#)
 - Scott E. Page: *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*
 - Urban Universities for Health: [Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions](#)

STEPS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE ADMISSIONS PROCESSES: STAGE 1

Below we explain and provide directions on five useful admission strategies to consider before and during this 2024 admission cycle.

Prepare to use the voluntary equity admission questions to enhance your admissions processes

In 2021, after broad and extensive consultation, SGPS added EDI voluntary equity questions to the graduate application (See [Appendix 1](#)).

For the 2024-2025 admission cycle, we will pause sharing the applicant's responses with programs.

This pause provides graduate programs with the time to better understand how to best use the information provided by the EDI questions to inform inclusive excellence admissions.

In response to your request for guidance on how to appropriately use the information provided by the application equity questions, we suggest the following:

- Reflect on the current diversity among graduate students in your program, the diversity among your faculty members, and the diversity in your discipline.
- Consider where greater diversity is warranted. Consider reasons for the lack of diversity in your program and, if relevant, your discipline.

- Create admission goals that proactively include the principles of indigenization, decolonization, accessibility, inclusion, and diversity.
 - In this regard, consider whether you and/or Western support units can provide appropriate support for the proposed increase in equity-deserving students (see [Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#) for supports available at Western).
- Consider how you, as a program, would communicate and provide support to students. Create an action plan.
- Give attention to the recommendations in this Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Admissions document when reviewing applications.
- Participate in SGPS Inclusive Excellence Conversation sessions on Inclusive Excellence in graduate admissions.
- Consider how the information provided by these programs might be used in your graduate admission process. This should be a transparent process.

Reflect on your positionality

The process of reflecting on your positionality will help you to understand how your academic background and life experiences, which derive from your social and cultural positions and identities, have shaped your unconscious (also referred to as implicit) biases around what constitutes a strong applicant.

Faculty members tend to define academic excellence based on their own academic backgrounds. Consequently, they accord merit to candidates that are/seem similar to themselves in terms of academic pedigree, but also in terms of socioeconomic background, qualities, identities, experiences, etc. And while members of admission committees may vary in terms of their backgrounds and specific areas of interest, they often share a common worldview about disciplinary values and methods of measuring applicants and students (Posselt, [Inside Graduate Admissions](#)). This means that admission criteria, whether quantitative or qualitative, are often determined by individual positionalities and the way(s) that admission committees (as a group) perceive their program and discipline.

Awareness of individual and disciplinary assumptions and/or biases may assist you in identifying and evaluating a broader subset of applicants who have potential to do well in your program (e.g., you acknowledge that a strong PhD applicant could have conducted a different form of creative work such as podcast or creative design, as part of their relevant past experiences).

The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion offers several online modules, including [Transforming Power and White Privilege](#), which addresses positionality and allyship and [Bias and Microaggressions](#), which allows you to learn about and address biases, microaggressions, and macroaggressions. We also invite you to consider doing the [Harvard Implicit Test](#).

Consider your assumptions and biases

It is generally understood that biases and assumptions are held by everyone. Accepting that there may be assumptions and biases tied to aspects of applicants' identities (as can be inferred from their application packages) is core to choosing the strongest applicants. Recognizing your own assumptions and biases, and actively confronting them before and as you review prospective students' applications ensures that you do not rule out potential successful students. Below are few examples of assumptions/biases that could be held:

- o Assumptions that a strong PhD applicant will have an academic background similar to members of the committee/potential supervisor.
- o Assumptions that an applicant will have academic publications from their master's thesis: [SSHRC: Assessing Research Quality and Impact](#)
- o Assumptions that older applicants have poor memories or have inflexible thinking (Angel Evans: [It's time to combat ageism in higher education](#))
- o Assumptions that a multilingual or "non-native" English speaker will not meet the scholarly written and/or speaking standards for a graduate program (Stephen May: [Linguistic racism: Origins and implications](#))

SGPS has created a Graduate Application Review Guide that lists other common biases that we all share: [SGPS: Graduate Application Review Guide](#).

A willingness to move towards inclusive excellence practices is often accompanied by a curiosity and openness to program innovations that will enhance a graduate program's strengths. Below we recommend engaging your faculty on an exercise that will identify the attributes and competencies that characterize those who thrive in your graduate programs.

Identify the characteristics of students who do well in your program

Based on consultations with Dr. Cynthia Pickett (Associate Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, DePaul University), an expert in the field of inclusive graduate admission practices, we recommend that you engage in an exercise with your graduate faculty that leads to the identification of the qualities and characteristics of successful/thriving graduate students in your program (for example, resilience, work ethic, persistence, self-motivation, creative problem solving etc.). The purpose of the exercise is to produce additional indicators of academic competence. This exercise often dismantles stereotypes or entrenched beliefs about what a strong applicant looks like, and helps programs more accurately reframe what constitutes a student who is likely to thrive in their program. The identified qualities and characteristics can then be integrated into your letter of reference template, application assessment rubric, statement of interest to support consistency in application evaluation. The Stage 2 report will provide more details.

The argument is that placing importance on program-identified competencies/skills, qualities and characteristics of successful students represents a more all-encompassing approach to identifying potential for degree completion than traditional individual markers of competence, such as grades and publications. A similar exercise was done as part of an SGPS retreat that included leaders in graduate education and EDIAD. See the [Graduate Programs Admission Reflection Summary](#).

Below is a list of qualities identified by the members of the SGPS retreat. We encourage admission committees to pay attention to any evidence of qualities, like the ones below, that indicate that an applicant will be a successful graduate student.

- Work Ethic
- Social Capital and Context (networking and community [engagement] skills)
- Integrity
- Resilience
- Prior Knowledge and Skills
- Willingness/Openness and Ability to Learn
- Communication and Writing Skills (in language of study)
- “Traits” – curiosity, critical thinking, multi-tasking ability, internally motivated, compassionate, respectful, team player, humility, willingness to be mentored, good interpersonal skills, flexible and able to shift thinking, self-aware, able to maintain health work/life balance, community engaged, etc.

Ensure that grades are being effectively utilized to identify strong students

Grades Re-considered.

Grades, while essential to the admission process, are not only and always the best indicators of research, analytical, and critical thinking skills (Julie Posselt; William Sedlacek; Robert Sternberg). Indeed, there is *no linear relationship between admission grades and degree completion*. A more inclusive approach to admissions contextualizes grades within the entire application, rather than viewing them as discrete indicators of a student’s potential for graduate school.

SGPS [policy on admissions](#) stipulates that while applicants to master’s programs “require at least a 70% average in senior level academic courses,” ***equivalent qualifications may be considered*** based on the standards of the discipline or profession. In other words, programs have the flexibility to consider equivalent requirements if an applicant does not meet the 70% grade minimum. While not explicitly stated, equivalent qualifications should also be considered for applicants to a doctoral program.

Equivalent requirements refer to indicators of competency that portend successful completion of the degree. If a program is considering equivalent qualifications, for example, in light of an applicant’s low grades, they must ensure that they collect sufficient evidence to make an

informed decision that the student has the background, knowledge, and abilities to thrive in their program.

Ultimately, the role of grades and admission averages on the decision to admit an applicant to your program *rests with you*. Below we provide useful information as you re-consider the role of grades and averages in an inclusive admissions process.

Traditionally, grades tend to be highly weighted in admission decisions, in part because of the belief that they differentiate between strong and weak students. Unpacking how to interpret grades within an applicant's whole file deserves attention. Here we elaborate on factors to consider as you review the role of grades and grade point averages on admission decisions.

- a. Consider de-emphasizing grades as the only and most important criterion for admission, and instead view them within the breadth of the entire application. For example, an applicant who completed an undergraduate degree a few years ago with an average of 74% while being employed full-time and caring for a sick elderly parent may be unfairly identified as 'weak' due to their grade point average. A committee could consider the applicant holistically by discussing their qualities and characteristics that portend graduate degree success found in other application components, such as the narrative CV ([University of Oxford: How to Write a Narrative CV](#)), personal statement (see [Appendix 4](#)), holistic reference letter (see [Appendix 5](#)), and admission interview (see [Appendix 6](#)) for tips on interviewing prospective international students from Western International). Additional information, such as a particularly high grade in a foundational knowledge course, demonstrated passion for a particular research area, strong writing skills, may also be relevant.
- b. Other circumstances that can affect an applicant's GPA (like previous study in a non-inclusive environment, lack of academic accommodation, societal poverty, and work responsibilities) are also key factors to keep in mind when deciding an applicant's suitability for your graduate program.
- c. Considering grades through an inclusive excellence lens may help in identify applicants with potential for graduate education but who lack foundational knowledge or sufficient graduate level English Language skills. For example, a current informal practice among some programs is to advise promising potential applicants who do not have the necessary foundational discipline knowledge, to take additional courses and then reapply to the program. Another example is the creation of bridging programs/opportunities that target those who need better discipline knowledge and/or English Language proficiency. Applicants with potential for graduate education may be considered for such bridging programs.

There is some confusion around how programs can best interpret grades from universities outside of North America. Below we explain SGPS' role in calculating students' incoming averages, and SGPS' grade conversion practice. We then provide some guidance around strategies for interpreting this information as you make admission decisions.

For applications to a master's or graduate diploma program, admission averages are calculated using the last two years of full-time study. For doctoral applications, admission averages are calculated using all postgraduate grades earned in degree programs. Letter grades are converted to numerical value using the Alpha/12-Point/North American % Grad Conversion Chart in order to calculate an admission average. This chart also includes the conversion of these values to Canadian percentages.

However, it is important to note that while letter grades are generally considered to be equivalent across education systems (i.e., an "A" grade in Canada would be considered the same grade in the UK), percentage grades are not equivalent. For example, a grade of 75% is an A in the UK, a B in Canada, and a C in the US. Because of these variations in grading systems, SGPS converts admission averages to the Canadian equivalent.

But whatever admission average is provided by SGPS, and irrespective of the policy on admissions that stipulates a minimum 70% admission average, programs have the flexibility to consider equivalent requirements if an applicant does not meet this minimum. The implications are that if you rely *solely* on grade averages and conversions, you are at risk of missing students with the potential to thrive in your program. The following strategies will assist admission committees in better understanding and assessing applicants' previous education and averages.

Strategy #1: We advise that you **familiarize yourself with the differences in grading systems**.

This [International Credentials Equivalencies Table](#) offers some guidance on the types of qualifications and grades outside North America. The [International Grade Equivalency Table](#) also provides specific notes about grades from some countries. Although letter grades are considered equivalent across education systems, factors such as the demands of a specific institution, discipline, or trends within education systems can influence grades earned. Recognizing that there are variations in grading systems within and across countries and regions will assist in evaluating grades from outside Canada and North America more accurately.

Strategy #2: We also recommend that in the personal/research statement section you **encourage your applicants to comment on the value of their GPA and other educational achievements within their own educational contexts**. See [Appendix 4](#) for some information on writing personal statements. The Narrative CV and admission interviews are also spaces where applicants can be encouraged to provide information about themselves beyond their metric qualifications ([University of Oxford: How to Write a Narrative CV](#); [Appendix 6](#)).

In summary, considering an applicant from inclusive perspectives enables you to give credit for all the applicant's academic qualifications alongside their other achievements ([Why universities](#)

[need to look beyond grades when admitting international students](#)). By contextualizing the grade point average, you end up with a more meaningful review of each applicant.

Review your process of recruiting and welcoming new students.

[Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#) have comprehensive lists of student resources that will help graduate students to succeed in their programs at Western. The following steps will also help you to create a process by which all students, staff, and faculty members are aware of these supports.

- [Accessible Education](#) – ensure that staff and faculty members are aware that this service is available to eligible graduate students and that they understand how it can support graduate students. Also ensure that students are aware of this office and understand that the program is supportive of providing accommodation as recommended by the AE.
- Ensure that incoming students are aware of the [SGPS Affordability Calculator](#).
- Ensure that incoming international students are aware of the services available through the [Western International & Exchange Student Centre](#).
- Consider where gaps in support exist (e.g., mentorship for Indigenous students, racialized students, international students, first generation students, etc.) and actively consider options to offer support for those you admit.
- Consider creating mentorship opportunities where senior students can mentor incoming students. Create clear guidelines and learning opportunities to support upper graduate students desirous of mentoring incoming graduate students.
- Write a direct welcoming message to incoming students and provide them with helpful information about available resources and support ([Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#)).
- Arrange orientation and onboarding sessions for new students to provide guidance on program expectations, learning environment and campus life. If resources permit, arrange a welcome social event.

CONCLUSION

This Guidance emphasized how to implement a more inclusive approach to assessing graduate applications. Below is a *timeline* of our steps in this process. You will also find links to relevant support materials for students and faculties as well as readings around inclusive excellence in graduate admissions. A Stage 2 document is in progress, that will guide programs who would like to modify their applications for the 2025-2026 admission cycle.

SGPS welcomes your feedback and your partnership as we continue to, together, enhance Western's inclusive excellence graduate admission processes.

October 2024

SGPS TIMELINE

Preparation (2023-2024)

Fall 2023: Draft Version 1 - Guidance for Holistic Admissions completed

- Consultation with the EDIAD Working Group, Kim Clark - Assistant Dean EDIAD FSS, Alex Levine -EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) Research Specialist, Matt Dumouchel - SGPS, and Kamran Siddiqui - VP, SGPS

Spring 2024: Version 2 - Guidance for Holistic Admissions completed

- Consultation with Offices of EDI and Indigenous Initiatives, Research Western, Western International, Academic Office, CTL (Centre for Teaching and Learning), Student Experience, and SGPS

Fall 2024: Version 3 – Guidance on Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Admissions completed

- Consultation with the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) and Associate Deans Graduate (ADGs).

RELATED READING AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

Career

Council of Graduate Schools: [Shaping New Narratives about PhD Careers](#)

Grades and International Equivalencies

David Baidoo-Anu, Christopher DeLuca, and Liying Cheng: [Why Universities Need to Look Beyond Grades When Admitting International Students](#)

IFMA Foundation: [International Grade Equivalency Table](#)

University of Oxford: [International Qualifications](#)

University of Toronto: [International Credentials Equivalencies](#)

Excellence, Intelligence, and Diversity

Howard Gardner: *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*

Jeffrey Deckman: [Three Forms of Excellence Leaders Must Recognize and Mobilize for Success](#)

Julie Posselt: [Toward Inclusive Excellence in Graduate Education: Constructing Merit and Diversity in PhD Admissions](#)

Robert Sternberg: [A Theory of Adaptive Intelligence and its Relation to General Intelligence](#)

Robert Sternberg: [Rethinking What We Mean by Intelligence](#)

Scott E. Page: *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*

Scott E. Page: [The Diversity Bonus](#)

Holistic Admission

Council of Graduate Schools: [Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions](#)

Equity in Doctoral Education through Partnership and Innovation (EDEPI), [Postgraduate Researcher Competency-Based Admissions Framework](#)

Inside Higher Education: [Considering the Whole Student: A Look at Holistic Admissions](#)

Kira Talent, [Demystifying Holistic Admissions: The Comprehensive Guide to Holistic Review](#)

Michele Sandlin: [An Admissions/Enrollment Imperative for Predicting Student Success](#)

University of Michigan – Rackham Graduate School: [Holistic Admissions Best Practices](#)

Urban Universities for Health: [Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Findings from a National Survey](#)

Virginia Tech Graduate School: [Holistic Admission Review](#)

Positionality and Biases

Angel Evans: [It's Time to Combat Ageism in Higher Education](#)

Asmeret Asefaw Berhe and Sora Kim: [Unconscious Racial Bias Can Creep Into Recommendation Letters—Here's How to Avoid It](#)

Center for Disability Rights: [#Ableism](#)

Christine Ro: [The Pervasive Problem of 'Linguistic Racism'](#)

David Takacs: [How Does Your Positionality Bias Your Epistemology](#)

Georgetown University: [National Center for Cultural Competence](#).

Government of Canada: [Wheel of Privilege and Power](#)

Harvard University: [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#)

Indiana University Bloomington – Center of Excellence for Women & Technology: [Discussing Ageism in Higher Education](#)

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Stephen May: [Linguistic Racism: Origins and Implications](#)

University of Toronto: [Unconscious Bias and Search Committee Resources](#)

Valerie Fridland: [The Sound of Racial Profiling](#)

Western University - Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: [Transforming Power and White Privilege](#)

Western University – Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: [Bias and Microaggressions: Impact, Prevention, and Intervention](#)

Zainab Rasool & Christine Makuve: [‘You Can’t Even Talk English, So Don’t Talk!’](#)

Reference Letters and CVs

DORA: [The Narrative CV](#)

Elizabeth Adams: [Narrative CVs for Funding and Job Applications](#)

Imperial College: [Narrative CVs](#)

Jennifer Kong, Latishya Steele, and Crystal Botham: [Ten Simple Rules for Writing Compelling Recommendation Letters](#)

Karla Erickson: [The Art of Recommendation Letters](#)

Kim Lab: [Letters for POC](#)

Michelle Iwen: [Letters of Recommendation Affirm Inequity and Bias](#)

National Center for Women & Information Technology: [Avoiding Unintended Gender Bias in Letters of Recommendation \(Case Study 1\)](#)

Tomforth: [Gender Bias Calculator](#)

University of Michigan: [Invisible Knapsacks](#)

University of Oxford: [How to Write a Narrative CV](#)

Research Impact

Western: [Towards Western at 150](#)

IHSPR: [Research Impact](#)

NSERC - [Going Global \(nserc-crsng.gc.ca\)](#)

SSHRC: [Imagining Canada's Future](#)

APPENDIX 1: VOLUNTARY EQUITY QUESTIONS

(under SGPS review for 2024-2025 admission cycle)

[Applicant Equity Demographic Questions](#)

APPENDIX 2: WESTERN RESOURCES

Accessibility and Accommodation

[Accessible Education](#)

Career Services

[Become a Writing Centre Advisor](#)

[Career Education](#)

[Meet a Career Coach](#)

[MITACS Training](#)

[Own Your Future](#)

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[The Centre for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\)](#)
[Volunteering and Leadership](#)

Childcare

[Childcare: International & Exchange Students](#)
[Childcare & Schooling](#)
[Resources for Parents](#)

Finance

[Affordability Calculator](#)
[Financial Management](#)
[Funding and Fees](#)
[OSAP & Government Loans \(for Domestic Students\)](#)

Graduate Student Organizations

[Society of Graduate Students \(SOGS\)](#)
[SOGS Food Bank](#)
[Society of Graduate Students: Peer Support Drop-Ins](#)
[The Graduate Teaching Assistant and Postdoctoral Associate Union: PSAC 610](#)

Health and Wellness

[Book a Physical Health Appointment](#)
[Black and Racialized Student Supports](#)
[Group Care and Workshops](#)
[Keep Your Body in Mind: Living Well @ Western](#)
[Massage Therapy](#)
[Mental Health Support](#)
[OHIP Personal Health Information | ontario.ca](#)
[Personal Health Information for Non-Ontario Canadian Residents](#)
[Supplementary Health Coverage for Graduate Students](#)
[University Health Insurance Plan \(UHIP\) - Health Insurance for International Students](#)
[Wellness & Well-being - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

Housing

[Off-Campus Housing Services](#)
[Platt's Lane Estates](#)
[University Apartments](#)

Life and Community

[City of London: Community Services](#)
[City of London: Explore Downtown](#)
[City of London: Living in London](#)
[City of London: Neighbourhood Programs and Funding](#)
[CONNECT with Community](#)

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[Graduate Student Life: Grad Life Coaching](#)

[Groceries on Campus](#)

[Life and Community @ Western](#)

[Maps and Directions](#)

[Play - Finding Friends and Fun](#)

[Student Experience](#)

[The Grad Club](#)

[Tourism London](#)

[University Affairs: How to Survive your First Year of Graduate School](#)

[Western Campus Recreation](#)

[Western Events Calendar](#)

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

[Calendar of Events](#)

[Directory](#)

[EDIAD and Indigenization in Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Studies](#)

[Postdoctoral Services](#)

[SGPS: Policy on Graduate Admissions](#)

[Senate Academic Policies and Procedures and SGPS Regulations](#)

[Services](#)

[The Wire: Read About Graduate Student Events](#)

[Thesis Guide](#)

Study, Research, and Writing Services

[Learning Development & Success](#)

[Study - Navigating Academia](#)

[The Writing Centre \(WSC\)](#)

[Western Libraries - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

[Writing Centre Resources](#)

[Writing Resources and Retreats](#)

Western International

[International Student Advising Services](#)

[Programs and Services](#)

[International Student Wellness](#)

Western Technology

[Technology Services/WTS Helpdesk](#)

Other Places to Get Help

[Crisis Contact Information](#)

[Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)

[EDIAD Graduate Academic Advisor \(SGPS Directory\)](#)

[Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Support](#)

[Human Rights Office](#)

[Office of the Ombudsperson](#)

[Office of the Registrar](#)

Program Administrator and Coordinator

Program Graduate Chair and Associate Dean Research

[Student Support and Case Management](#)

APPENDIX 3: OFFICE OF INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES

[An Anishinaabe Framework for Indigenous Education](#)

[CTL: Indigenous Teaching and Learning Resources](#)

[Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members](#)

[Guide for Working with Indigenous Students](#)

[Indigenous Admissions Access Category – Undergrad Admissions](#)

[Indigenous Education Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework](#)

[Indigenous Initiatives at Western Law](#)

[Indigenous Learning Bundles](#)

[Indigenous Student Centre- Future Students](#)

[Indigenous Student Centre – Graduate and Secondary-Entry Admissions](#)

[Indigenous Student STEM Access Program](#)

[Kathy Absolon: Indigenous Wholistic Theory](#)

[Learning and Development](#)

[Medicine Wheel Teaching by Kaaren Dannenmann](#)

[N'Satung: The Thinking of Young Indigenous People Regarding Education](#) (Video)

[Online Learning Modules](#)

[Student Supports](#)

[The Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#)

[The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success](#)

[Welcome Indigenous Students](#)

[Western Undergraduate Admission Pathways](#)

[What I Wish My Professors Knew About Me](#) (Video)

APPENDIX 4: AN APPROACH TO WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT- An Example

What is the purpose of a Personal Statement?

A personal Statement is your opportunity to discuss your motivations for wanting to study a specific program and what you hope to achieve in the program and with the qualification.

While your application package already shows your educational qualifications, the space of the personal statement allows you to demonstrate your strengths, traits, and uniqueness to the admission committee, and to narrate those aspects of your story that the rest of your application materials do not show.

While writing the statement, remember that the admission committee members are probably not familiar with your writing, planning, and critical thinking skills. They will likely use this piece of writing to evaluate those skills as well as your ability to follow instructions. The admissions committee may also not be familiar with your previous educational qualifications and

context(s); therefore, you can use this opportunity to contextualize and comment on the value of your GPA and other (educational) achievements.

The committee will be reading a lot of applications across the world from qualified applicants as yourself. The quality of your personal statement can help you to stand out.

Tips for Writing a Personal Statement

- ❖ Start preparing early, so that you have enough time to write several drafts of your statement, receive feedback, and revise before submission.
- ❖ Learn how to write a personal statement. Read these tips for writing a personal statement as well as the resources at the end of this document.
- ❖ If you have access to writing centres or libraries, visit those places for help in understanding the purpose of a personal statement and how to write one.
- ❖ Where possible, also solicit the help of instructors and other people in your circle or community. Discuss the ideas you have with them and reach out for their feedback after you have written the statement.
- ❖ One of the most important things in any form of writing is knowing your audience. Do a close reading of the institution and department's website. The later especially will enable you to understand faculty and departmental areas of interests and to learn key words or phrases that will come in useful in your statement.
- ❖ Your writing should be clear, jargon-free, and mindful of different audiences.
- ❖ Think about how closely your qualifications and interests fit into the department and the university. Consider how to tailor your qualifications and experiences to fit with the goals and vision of the department and institution.
- ❖ Before you start writing, read the instructions carefully. Revisit the instructions after writing the personal statement.
- ❖ Be sure to organize your writing into clearly defined sections/paragraphs. Check to see if the program of your choice has provided any format for writing the personal statement.
- ❖ If there are available samples provided by the department, take note of how the department or university has formatted and organized their own personal statements or similar types of writing. Western University's [Writing Centre](#) will be useful here.
- ❖ Tailor your language and writing accordingly. While applicants are encouraged to share their "story" through the personal statement, remember that you are writing for an **academic audience** and that **the purpose of your writing** is to gain admission into a graduate program in a university.
- ❖ Revise and proofread your statement. Revising your statement enables you to check that you have followed the instructions provided for you and that your writing follows relevant formatting. Careful proofreading enables you to check for grammar and punctuation errors as well as typos.

Good luck!

Other Resources for Writing Personal Statements

GoGrad, “Writing a Winning Personal Statement for Grad School”:

<https://www.gograd.org/resources/grad-school-personal-statement/>

Indeed, “Tips for Writing a Personal Statement for Graduate School”:

<https://ca.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/personal-statement-for-graduate-school>

King’s University College, “Writing your Personal Statement or Statement of Intent: A Step-by-Step Guide”:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/academics/ml/writePlace/professional/Writing-Your-Personal-Statement-or-Statement-of-Intent.pdf>

Purdue OWL, “Personal Statements”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFLibDGVTj8>

Purdue OWL, “Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls”:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/writing_the_personal_statement/top_10_rules_and_pitfalls.html

The University of Chicago: The Law School: “In Their Own Words: Admissions Essays that Worked”:

<https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/their-own-words-admissions-essays-worked>

UC Davis, “How to Write a Strong Personal Statement for Graduate School”:

<https://www.ucdavis.edu/majors/blog/how-to-write-strong-personal-statement-for-graduate-school>

University HG: “Writing a Winning Personal Statement for Grad School”:

<https://universityhq.org/degrees/online-masters/personal-statement/>

APPENDIX 5: REFERENCE LETTER TEMPLATE EXAMPLES

The Inclusive Reference Template – A

We recommend that programs determine what traits, abilities, and accomplishments they want emphasized in the reference letters and customize this section accordingly. Traits, abilities, and accomplishments highlighted should ideally be based on the [characteristics of students who do well in your program](#). Below is an example of what you could ask for.

How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?

Thinking about your interactions with and knowledge of the applicant, how would you describe the applicant in terms of the following characteristics? Please provide an example where possible.

Academic, Scholarly, and/or Professional Achievements

Resilience and Ability to Overcome Challenges

Oral and Written Communication

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (or Research)

Teamwork and Community Engagement

Is there anything else you would like to share about the applicant’s potential for graduate studies?

The Inclusive Reference Template – B

Referees may choose to write their letters in the box below or upload the letters as PDF Documents. We recommend that you direct referees to comment on the specific traits, abilities, and accomplishments that you want emphasized in the reference letters. Language like the following can be used as a prompt for the referee:

How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?

In your letter, comment on the applicant’s potential to thrive in and complete your programs. Please pay particular attention to the following:

- Academic, Scholarly, and/or Professional Achievements
- Resilience and Ability to Overcome Challenges
- Oral and Written Communication
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (or Research)
- Teamwork and Community Engagement

You may prefer to write and upload your Reference Letter as a PDF Document.

The Inclusive Reference Template – C

Programs may also prefer to adapt this template which allows referees to both rank and comment on an applicant’s traits, abilities, and accomplishments.

How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?

How would you rate this applicant?	Very Strong	Strong	Average	Needs Improvement
Academic, Scholarly, and/or Professional Achievements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resilience and Ability to Overcome Challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oral and Written Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (or Research)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamwork and Community Engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide the most compelling reason (s) for supporting this candidate’s application.

Is there anything else you would like to share about the applicant’s potential for graduate studies?

Referees may request other means more accessible to them to provide their letters. They can contact SGPS or the relevant program for alternative means of providing references.

APPENDIX 6: TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Fabiana Tepedino and Ana Chiarelli (Western International) offer the following ideas to support faculty and staff interviewing international students as part of their graduate admissions. The ideas are based on their experiences working with international students at Western and feedback from international students at Western.

- It is important for interviewers to be aware of cultural differences of the candidates they are interviewing and to not make assumptions based on stereotypes and personal preferences. Being aware of cultural norms and customs, communication styles, gestures, habits, behavioural patterns, etc. is important. As well as being aware of their own implicit biases.
 - Within the Canadian context you are expected to have good eye contact, a firm handshake (if meeting in person) and to sell yourself in an interview. In many countries, candidates are expected to be humble and not boast about their experiences. Interviewers may need to ask additional questions in order to get more information that Canadian candidates would give up front.
 - Avoid using close-ended questions in interviews, as in many cultures it is impolite to say no. It is best to ask open-ended questions.
 - In some cultures, the initial small talk and relationship building is important and expected and in other cultures you are expected to get straight to business and start right away.
 - Being aware of non-verbal communication cues and what may be considered as rude in some cultures (e.g., thumbs up)
 - Being aware of what a successful interview can look like across cultures. In some countries for example, if the candidate is not a good fit, they will stop the interview half-way.

- It is important to be aware of the language being used on applications, instructions and interviews that is inclusive for all. Try to avoid using slang, jargon, idioms and colloquialisms. For example, many international students may not be aware of the meanings of EDI, GBSV, Truth and Reconciliation, BIPOC, or competencies.
- In interviews it is important to allow candidates time and space to think, process and translate their thoughts and words. Having closed captions and the transcript enabled is not only accessible for everyone but can be beneficial and helpful to non-native speakers as well.
- Being aware of time zones and software being used when interviews are being scheduled. Some countries have limited access to certain technology such as Google products, social media, Zoom, etc. Also being aware that their internet connections and access to technology may not always be the best and they may face some issues and may cause them to be late for an interview.
- The information a candidate shares in a resume/CV and in an interview may be different from what is shared in Canada. For example, in many countries it is common to include your picture, marital status, citizenship, etc.
- Being aware of the communication and hiring speed in different cultures may help set expectations in how quickly you hear back from candidates.
 - For example, in slow moving countries or in countries where there is a lot of red tape, it is normal for replies to take 1-2 weeks. In “hustle” cultures, you expected a reply within a few hours to 2 business days
 - The means of communication can also differ. In Canada, we expect candidates to communicate via email. In other cultures, it is common to communicate through apps like WhatsApp and Telegram or LinkedIn.
- The way in which feedback is given can also differ across cultures and cause miscommunication and misunderstanding. In Canada it is common to give the “sandwich” model of feedback (positive feedback, area of improvement, positive feedback). In other cultures, you focus on their strengths and in other cultures you focus on what they need to improve on only.
- And lastly, many international students may not have formal volunteer or work experiences and in many countries, students are expected to focus all their time on their studies.

Western International can also offer the following supports:

- A workshop on cross-cultural communication (verbal and non-verbal) and implicit bias as it relates to interview practices.
- A “best practices” document for staff conducting interviews.
- A “best practices and what to expect from the Canadian context” document for international applicants.