

A Handbook for Supporting Today's Graduate Students

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Volume 54, numéro 1, 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1115842ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v54i1.190395>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

ISSN

2293-6602 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Clarke, K. (2024). Compte rendu de [A Handbook for Supporting Today's Graduate Students]. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education / Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur*, 54(1), 129–131.
<https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v54i1.190395>

BOOK REVIEW

A HANDBOOK FOR SUPPORTING TODAY'S GRADUATE STUDENTS

REVIEWED BY

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Nguyen, D. J., and Yao, C. W. (Eds.). (2022). *A Handbook for Supporting Today's Graduate Students*. Routledge. Pages: 256. Price: USD 42.95 (paperback).

I approached reading this book from my perspective as a faculty member who researches graduate students in Canada. In this review, I describe the book's organization and chapter contributions, and identify areas where there is opportunity to further develop our understanding of graduate students.

The foreword is a strong overview from a leading scholar in the graduate education space, Dr. Ann Austin. She highlights the book's significance, noting that graduate students are critical to the future of the United States and beyond. The impact of graduate education can be felt within academia, industry, and government. Austin speaks to topics such as the increasingly diverse graduate student population, imposter syndrome and isolation, external pressures, and the supervisory relationship. Most topics are similarly discussed in Canada through organizations (e.g., Canadian Association of Graduate Studies), by scholars (e.g., Dr. Michelle Jacobsen, Dr. Nathan Hall), and in publications (e.g., Parchoma et al., 2020).

The introduction briefly discusses enrolment and attrition trends. The editors note that the purpose of the book is to "provide contemporary practices and programs that may provide a comprehensive approach to supporting graduate student success and completion"

(p. 2). The focus of the book is master's and doctoral programs, and excludes professional programs (e.g., law, medicine). This is important, because when we talk about graduate students, we often refer to them as a homogenous group, or only refer to doctoral students. There are differences between master's, doctoral, and professional students, and the exclusion of professional students illustrates that there is work to be done to understand the experiences of various subgroups of students and how they can be supported.

Part 1: Navigating Contexts and Identities

This section provides readers with a foundational understanding of graduate education in the United States and an overview of some specific student subgroups. The first chapter addresses enrolment trends for master's and doctoral students. Chapter author David Nguyen (2022) acknowledges that the demographics of the graduate student population are changing, and to illustrate these changes he presents data about sex and race/ethnicity. Unfortunately, some subgroups are not examined, such as disabled graduate students. In fact, other than a brief mention of accommodations in McCallum

et al.'s (2022) chapter about graduate student mental health, disability is mostly overlooked.

Other chapters in this section focus on on-line graduate students, graduate students of colour, first-generation graduate students, and Indigenous graduate students. Each chapter describes literature according to the experiences of these subgroups, and authors also discuss types of support that could be tailored to students' needs. Takeaways from these chapters include an understanding of enrolment trends, how various terms are defined, and key challenges.

In this section, a few comments are made about student identities and how there could be overlap between them. For example, chapter 3 addresses mentorship of students of colour and Turner et al. (2022) note that students of colour are often first-generation students. First-generation status is the focus of chapter 4, and within that chapter, Ardoin and Erb (2022) address the "layering of identity dimensions and experiencing-isms" (p. 58). These cross-chapter connections speak to the complexity of identity, and while this book does not investigate the broad spectrum of possible social identities, it highlights this as a consideration.

The final chapter discusses the hidden curriculum of graduate education. The authors suggest: "Beyond the formal academic curriculum, students also encounter an informal curriculum where individuals are held responsible for learning tacit knowledge about everything from securing an assistantship to writing academic papers in a particular style" (Lyles et al., 2022, p. 86). Recommendations are offered for administrators, faculty, and graduate students. A takeaway from this chapter is that aspects of the hidden curriculum must be made explicit, to improve the equity within this context.

Part 2: Addressing Academic and Professional Skill Development

This section focuses on the ways institutions can support master's and doctoral students

with the development of essential skills for degree completion. Chapters present promising practices related to developing teaching skills, supportive writing programs and environments, the importance of engagement in professional groups, and opportunities for international engagement. These chapters make noteworthy theoretical and practical contributions. Chapter 7 focuses on developing graduate students' teaching skills. The authors organize the chapter around a proposed Graduate Student Teaching Professional Development Framework. The chapter also includes a list of resources. Chapter 8 focuses on writing development and practical takeaways including an example of a literature matrix, a mind map, and a semester plan. The final two chapters also provide practical takeaways such as examples and resources. Overall, this is a strong section that is beneficial to a variety of stakeholders.

Part 3: Supporting Graduate Students Beyond the Classroom

Like Part 2, this section focuses on support, but support outside of the classroom. Topics are graduate student mental health, supporting students pursuing various career paths, financial challenges and support, the importance of student organizations, and work-life balance. The structure of chapters in this section involves discussing the challenges that students experience, followed by current and potential opportunities for support. There are takeaways for readers, such as recommendations for graduate students, faculty, and institutions.

There was some overlap between section two and three. I wondered about the way the editors framed the third section as "beyond the classroom," and I reflected on when and where support is provided. This is an important consideration because of how the structure of master's and doctoral students' programs differ in terms of length and degree requirements. Master's programs could consist of course-based and research-based options, and some

may include internships or other placement requirements. Doctoral programs also vary and may consist of courses, a proposal, a comprehensive exam, dissertation, and/or internship/placement. I wondered how the range of support considered in Parts 2 and 3 might differ according to where students are in their program. While the book provides a good overview of some current issues, investigating how experience and support differs based on phase of study is an area for future work.

Conclusion

This book is a starting point from which a further understanding of graduate students in the United States can be developed. More importantly for readers of the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, the volume addresses many subgroups of students and topics that are being discussed in Canada as well.

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