2014 Graduate Student Survey Results

Raw Data

Purpose: To inform the BGSA’s contribution for the department Self-Study for the upcoming Departmental Cyclical Review, requested by the Chair of the Department, Professor Graham Bell.

Overview: Questions in about the graduate program in the Biology department were asked to the BGSA mailing list. Questions could be answered anonymously online or emailed to Sarah Baldwin. The questions were organized into the following seven categories: 1) Application process, 2) Advisory support, 3) Teaching Opportunities, 4) Finances, 5) Departmental staff support, 6) Career preparation, 7) Quality and effectiveness of the graduate program.

Application process

Q1: Application Process If you have applied since 2013, how did you find the application process using uApply? Do you like the system where applicants communicate with a supervisor prior to the application process or would you have preferred a rotation system where you apply without a lab in mind? If you have transferred from a MSc to a PhD program, how did you find the transfer process?

* I am OK with the way it is, because I would not have applied to McGill if I didn't want to work with a specific PI here. In grad studies, I feel that you choose who you want to work with / and what you want to work on, and not the university per se.
* Applied pre-uApply, I think. In all honesty I can't remember. It was to start in Fall 2013.
* I applied before 2013. I am not sure I would have chosen a rotation system, but I would've like to have been informed if I had a choice.
* Applied before that year.
* I haven't used uAppy, but like the fact that there is no required rotation between McGill labs, but I think there could be a requirement to do a small project in another university. As long as funding is arranged by the university and not by the student themselves.
* The uApply system was efficient, and the system where applicants must have a supervisor prior to applying encouraged me to develop ideas around my thesis project early on
* I think having a supervisor in mind prior to applying is a huge assest, both in the application process and in the chances of a succsessful application.
* I transfered from a MSc, I found the process to be good.
* I prefer a system which requires prior communication with a potential supervisor because it gives the applicant more freedom with which to choose a lab that suites their interests. I believe this system also gives the student a better chance to become acquainted with their supervisor before deciding where they want to end up.
* Professor communication prior to application was good. The coordination of attaching reference letters was confusing for applicant and references.
* I think the process is best without a rotation system. However, I do think it is very important to meet with a professor in advance of working for them.
* I think that communication with a PI before you come is crucial. I am VERY happy that we don't have a rotation program.
* I think applying directly to a lab works well. It allows you to have a project in mind early on, and refine and develop as needed for a qualifying exam that is earlier at Mcgill compared to other universities. The transfer from a master's to a PhD program was seamless because I applied for funding as a phd student and secured support for 5 years.
* I think applicants should communicate with a supervisor prior to the application regardless of the type of process.
* I think that, at least for PhD programs, communication with a supervisor and deciding on a rough project and course of study with them is much more important than the actual application system. I think having students apply for a general PhD program prior to finding a supervisor would also admit students who may have great credentials but who have not gone through the process of really considering their path through a PhD or an area of interest/project that they want to focus on. For MSc programs, I can see some merit in being admitted to a cohort and then going through the process of finding a supervisor, but I could see many issues with this: students left without funding, or a supervisor to take them, more students admitted than can be accommodated, students lost in the process without real direction etc. I think if the Biology Dept adopted a system like this for the MSc program, it would be important to have a key program of study for the first semester for these students as they find a supervisor, e.g. a core class about research, cohort expectations such as facilitating discussion groups, clear expectations and deadlines for finding a supervisor, rotation through different labs in structured research assistantships etc. I see this prolonging the MSc program though
* I like the supervisor communication system.
* I like choosing a supervisor in advance. Most people want to know whom they will be working with and what their research project will be prior to committing to a school.

Supervision

Q2: Advisory Support Do you have any comments on the Advisor system? If you are in the PhD program, what are your comments on the Qualifying Exam process? Do you find Supervisory Committee Meetings to be helpful?

* I am satisfied with the Advisor system. I think the Supervisory Committee Meetings are very helpful. I find that the SC meetings to be one of the most helpful things during my time here.
* Supervisory committee is helpful.
* I did not find my committee meetings to be much help. I don't think committee members read my proposal beforehand, nor offered much help to improve the things they criticized. It was a stressful process each time I prepared for a committee meeting, especially the first one because I did not know what to expect. It would be helpful if BGSA could help explain this process with senior students presenting about their experiences. The QE was especially stressful because students have such variable experiences. My advisor was not very helpful in the lead up to my QE - I didn't know what to expect and my supervisory committee members were not very helpful in suggesting things to read or what to prepare.
* I am in the depths of preparing for my QE, so would be in a better position after to speak to it - but I can say that this process seems quite a bit more focused on actual research than on "academia trivial pursuit". Stay the course?
* I find Committee meetings are helpful. However, I have seen several PhD students go without one for several years after their QE, and only do their next one when they want permission to do a PhD Seminar. I've seen one student be negatively influenced by this because she thought she was ready to do their PhD Seminar, but the Committee Meeting did not go as planned. Maybe if they had stayed on track with their meetings, this would not have happened. I think supervisors and students would benefit from some sort of reminding system.
* Supervisory Committee Meetings are definitely very helpful, and in general the Advisor system works fine, and the QE is feasible, apart for the strong psychological component.
* I really like the committee meetings, they help to strengthen the project. the QE process could be much more enjoyable however. The documents and how it will go isn't clear, and there is still rumors going around that it's very hard. The psychology department at UQAM has a system where students from the same cohort/year meet once a week to discuss, analyse their work and progress together towards the Q.E. I think this could make the students feel a bit more supported
* I have yet to have a Supervisory Committee meeting, but found it difficult to find appropriate SC members
* The Qualifying Exam process was good, mostly because of the support I got from my supervisor and fellow students.
* It would be useful if the SC made it clear they were a support. It's not the culture here to consult SC members with problems, even though that's the purpose, and it feels like it's because student's are not arware of this
* I thought there could be more leeway in terms of the deadline by which a QE must be held (18 months for a new PhD). If a student starts in September and their project is summer fieldwork-based, this only gives them six months after the first field season to analyze their field data and figure out if it will realistically answer the questions their asking. SC meetings were very helpful.
* I think committee meetings are very important. I think we all put them off and try not to have them every year but I feel like there should be someone in charge of making sure they happen every year.
* Committee meetings very helpful. More frequent meetings and/or communication with committee should be encouraged.
* SC Meetings are helpful, if your committee is willing to take the time to meet with you. It was an absolute NIGHTMARE trying to get my QE scheduled, I gave my committee every day for six weeks, every hour of every day. And no one would budge on when they were available, which forced me to change committee members at the last minute. I sent out the original doodle to plan a date two months in advance, so it was not like I was waiting until the last minute. I understand how busy the profs in the department are, but I find it rather disrespectful that they believe they are so much more important than everyone else that they are not willing to work with students on finding a date for something like a QE.
* Qualifying exam was tough, but its a right of passage. Its good that its early, as it allows you to see where you are in your project and your education 'before its too late." Committee meetings are helpful, but a nerve wreck.
* I find committee meetings to be only minimally helpful. Perhaps if the committee was more involved in the research they could be worthwhile. The qualifying exam process was okay, although it seems to be far less demanding than at other universities or in other departments.
* No comments on the advisor system. The qualifying exam process is satisfactory. Committee meetings are helpful only if students follow up on issues raised and when the committee stays on top of the student's project. I think a lot of the success of the committee meetings relies on student initiative, as it should.
* I find committee meetings helpful, though unlike where I obtained my Master's, my committee is very uninvolved in my project. During my Master's I went to all (3 outside of my supervisor) of my committee members and asked for help/advice on a regular basis. Here, I generally feel discouraged to ask for help because I find that they act like they don't have time. I also found the QE process very challenging in terms of getting proper guidance for preparation. I went to my committee members and asked for advice and they gave me very little. I also felt like the examination was fairly arbitrary - I believe that my portrayal of confidence and style of answering questions weighed their decision more than my knowledge. Furthermore, I do not feel like I was properly prepared by my supervisor. During my QE, I was chastised for having a long proposal, which was guided by my supervisor, and grilled heavily for having a large amount of preliminary data, also guided by my supervisor, which in retrospect I should not have shown all of as I had not yet fully analyzed and dissected the results.
* For me, both the advisor system and QE process have been satisfactory. I have heard rumours that there are initiatives underway to make the QE process more rigorous. While I think this could be a good idea, a more clear rubric for evaluating qualifying exams would need to be developed. As of this point, there really isn’t an objective way of evaluating QEs. I think supervisory committee meetings are essential.
* More checks and balances of an advisors power would be useful. The qualifying exam was useful although I would have liked to have a section of more clearly defined material that had to be learned rather than blindly forging into the literature trying to cover everything. Yes. [supervisory meetings are helpful]
* I wish my committee had played a more active role. They were very knowledgeable and helpful but only seeing them once a year was almost useless. Maybe I should have taken initiative to reach out more, but there just isn’t a culture of working closely with your committee members (and everyone is already too busy).

Teaching

Q3: Overall how has TAing contributed to your graduate experience? Is it mandatory for you? Have you been able to TA courses that you requested?

* I enjoyed TAing but it took a lot of time out of my work. I think students in their last year, especially the last semester, should not have to TA. TAing was not mandatory for me.
* Valuable experience TAing. It is mandatory. I was able to TA my requested courses.
* Teaching is not mandatory as I have an NSERC. I hope that I am able to teach in the next few years, even while holding the NSERC.
* A TAship has not been mandatory. If anything, it has been slightly discouraged because it takes away from lab work. I was still allowed to TA when I asked for it, and I think it as helped me learn valuable skills.
* It is mandatory since it is part of my income, which is already the minimum since the high fees for international students. I like the teaching experience, which is something that I wouldn't have expected before.
* Yes, I really enjoy it. It was mandatory but is not anymore. I didn't always get the courses that I requested. Although there are some form outside the biology department, I think the TAs should be trained a bit better. The physics department holds a TA day often, to help TAs improve their teaching and reduce the stress associated to this. However, I feel like since the number of TAs and hours have been cut, work has dramatically increased for the TAs, and most are working over their hours.
* TAing has been an interesting experience, and one that I appreciate. I TA'd a course that I requested, and it has been beneficial to re-learn some of the basics
* The TA pool system is very bizarre with late PhD student's being towards the bottom, and not getting TAships when they have no money. It was not mandatory as I had funding. I got the TA I requested for the fall, and there were no opening for me in the winter this year
* TAing was a fun way to get some teaching experience. As well, it helped with my presentation skills. It was mandatory for me to TA during 3 of the 4 semesters of my Masters. I TAed the courses I requested.
* Teaching has been one of the best parts of my graduate experience at McGill. It's an important life skill, particularly in academia. It was not mandatory for me, but I TA'd every semester I could. The only frustrating part was the TA priority pool policy, which meant that I was not permitted to TA courses I had most experience in and was most qualified for in my last two semesters.
* Taing was not mandatory but I did TA two times. I think that it is helpful in gaining more experience in teaching and seeing if this is the right thing for people.
* TAing is rewarding experience. I've enjoyed it very much. It's included in my stipend. TA'd the courses I requested.
* TAing during my graduate experience was great. I learned a great deal. It was not mandatory for me, I received half of the compensation. However, my professor was reluctant to let people in our lab TA in the first place.
* I love teaching. It is not mandatory but I teach 180 hours every other semester. I love the small lab sizes and getting to teach the labs myself.
* TA-ing is not mandatory for me, but it provides extra money, and that is a good thing. It was been an invaluable part of my education, and one of the more meaningful and rewarding experiencing in graduate school. I haven't typically gotten my choice of what to TA
* I have no yet been able to TA. Although it is not mandatory for me, I would have liked to. It would be nice to have more TAships for shorter courses or field courses, for students whose field work or collaborations mean they cannot be on campus for a full semester.
* Not applicable; TA'ing is not mandatory for me
* I have TAed one course that I requested and will be TAing the same course again in the Winter. I generally enjoy TAing and find that it encourages me to work more with undergraduates through work- and independent-studies. However, I did not think it was mandatory for me, and was surprised to find that it was included as part of my funding package this year so that I am receiving the minimum salary despite voluntarily deciding to TA.
* TAing is mandatory for me. I think that overall it has improved my communication skills. However, I do not think that it has improved my research skills or critical thinking skills.
* Due to external funding, I have not pursued TA opportunities at this point in time. I have however, held research assistantships through the McGill Office of Sustainability and Teaching and Learning Services. These experiences have been very important to my development as a PhD student.
* No it is not mandatory for me but I found it enjoyable. Yes. [able to TA courses requested]
* TAing was one of my most rewarding experiences. I wish, as a student who had previous teaching experience, that I’d had access to teaching higher level courses, but I understand the union’s hiring priorities. I was discouraged from TAing in my first year because I had an NSERC award but actually I had plenty of free time (especially in my first semester) and wish I’d had the opportunity to get started with my teaching experience right away.

Finances

Q4: Finances Do you feel the financial support is adequate? Do you have support to travel to conferences and execute your research goals?

* Yes it is adequate. I did have support to travel to conferences and for field work.
* No! No way. And I heard that the department is considering reducing financial support from the already-low $15,500/year. Montreal might not be a very expensive city to live in, compared to Toronto or Vancouver, but keeping students in poverty and making them TA 180 hours a semester is not conducive to a healthy or productive work environment. I hear so often about other students going over their TA hours, and the professor knows about it but does not stop it, or discourages the student from using the AGSEM regulations. Professors are not very responsible about adhering to the union regulations, and it is unrealistic to expect htat students will be able to stand up to their supervisor - or an intimidating professor - all the time.
* Yes. [funding is adequate]
* Base level of support is barely a living wage and I had to eat into savings before receiving the NSERC. Lots of money for conferences, not enough opportunities to fund field work.
* I've never had a problem.
* Not at all, at least for International students. It's good that the minimum is guaranteed, but given the living costs in Montreal I think it should be slightly raised. I know that it depends on funds availability, but in my case the minimum is pretty low.
* This is a weird question, of course the financial support is completely inadequate. There is barely enough money to pay all the bills and food for a month, let alone wanting to save a bit for things like paying back student loans! Moreover, when TAing to make a bit more money, then research goals are not achieved. Let's try to make a budget. With the required package set by the department of =/- 20 000 a year (non-international student, including money form TAing), we have to deduce about 4000 for tuition fees, including health insurance etc. so technically our stipend is 16 000 for 12 months, roughly 1 300 per month (by the way, for a single person family, stats.gov estimated in 2011 that the low-income cutoff, before taxes, is 20 651$, http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/conditions-vie-societe/revenu/faible-revenu/seuilsmfr\_qcavi.htm). A monthly budget: -80 a month for public transport (since we aren't considered "students" anymore above 25, and yes, quite a few of us are above 25!) -Probably about 60$ for a cheap cellphone line -15 $ a month for the cheapest internet (assuming there are 2 roommates splitting the cheapest plan) -probably about 50$ a month for hydro (also assuming sharing between 2 roommates) -15$ for house insurance (splitting again between 2) - it's likely that every one pays at least 400$ a month for rent. although most of the people around me at the moment pays about 600$. Let's round it to 500$. \*Note that there aren't any "TV" plan in this estimation. This really optimistic budget leaves 580$ a month for everything else. Everything else includes glasses, dental health, the little bit we pay on prescription drugs, food! (yes we eat!), clothes, shampoo, toothpaste.. It's very, very tight. I do understand the limits of budgets, and how the system works. But it is slightly ridiculous nonetheless that we are payed so little. the department has grants for field work and conferences. I haven't receive the second one, but the travel grant has been really helpful for my research. the conference grant is a bit small, given the registration fees and plane tickets, but still it's good to have a few helpful grants.
* The financial support is adequate, and the grants I have applied for thus far, will cover travel expenses and research goals
* My financial support has been adequate, but it has been almost entirely from external sources.
* With outside funding, I was fine. My supervisor used to pay for a conference, but no longer has the funds to do so, so I have been using QCBS, which has been great.
* My financial support was adequate for a student lifestyle. I received a travel grant once for a conference.
* Financial support was adequate. I paid out of pocket for most of the conferences I went to, though. There could be more oppurtunities for travel grants made availible.
* I think that the financial support (specifically the minimum required stipend from the department) is too low. Unless this requirement designated higher by the department, students are never going to be paid more. The minimum stipend has been the same for at least the last 5 years. Our rent is going up but not the wage. I have support to go to conferences.
* The financial support seems suitable for my needs.
* Funding is supportive through my lab. Funding for local workshops or conferences would be nice (registration costs, posters etc.
* Yes, my financial support was adequate. I was supported for conferences and our lab had enough money to complete any necessary experiments.
* Honestly, I do not find the financial support adequate. The stipends that we receive are absolutely not enough to live in this city.
* More funding is always good. Duh. I have minimal support for travel and conferences, but I have had adequate support for field work because I am in the NEO program, which is awesome.
* No, the current stipend is not keeping up with the rising costs of living in Montreal. I very rarely receive support for conferences, either I pay myself or do not go. I have received more support for field work, but often end up paying large portions out of my own pocket. I feel my research in general is limited by the availability of financial support.
* Financial support is adequate for domestic students, unfortunately not for international students. I have support from my PI to attend conferences and workshops.
* No, I do not think the financial support is adequate. I believe it should be standard that graduate students receive 20,000 a year (after tuition). I am finding it very difficult to live within the minimum salary that I am now receiving and feel that I am being undervalued. Yes, I have enough for conferences and had enough for my research.
* No I do not feel financial support is adequate. However I do think that the Biology department at McGill is probably one of the better departments/schools in terms of financial support for graduate students.
* All of my financial support has come from external scholarships and has been adequate. For travel for conferences etc., I have mostly been able to find travel grants through the department or university. My supervisor has also been very supportive in this regard.
* Most excellent but have been entirely funded by external sources to date. The QCBS were extremely helpeful in this regard!
* I had sufficient funds throughout my MSc. I am grateful that there is a minimum stipend, which ensures all grad students are taken care of. Working a full 180 TA term to get the funds can be a heavy workload, but overall I would say funding was good, with lots of opportunities for conference grants, both internally and from affiliated research networks.

Staff Support

Q5: Do you feel like you have adequate support from department staff (administrative staff, IT staff)? Have you noticed a change since the reduction of staff as of September 2013?

* I was not at McGill prior to Sept. 2013 so I can't comment. I do feel I have support right now.
* I noticed a big change when Susan retired and Ancil had to take on so much more work. Ancil is great - I don't want to be misunderstood as saying she isn't - but it is too much work for one person. I like the staff but we don't interact with them very much, except at the staff day with food and introductions. I experience the department in a very hierarchical and separatist manner, where students talk to profs, and profs talk to staff, but students and staff don't interact much. Some do, but I don't think most do. I would like there to be a more collegial atmosphere, as I had at my previous university. This department is very silo'd even though it pretends not to be. I wish there was more friendliness and interaction between students, faculty, and staff. Only a few faculty come to student events like the barbeques or holiday party, and they are the same ones all the time. It is difficult to talk to professors and that isn't right, it should be easier and they should make more of an effort outside their own labs and students. That kind of change starts at the top with having a more approachable chair and more visibility within the department, like actually attending student talks and being encouraging of students at things like wine and cheese events after seminars, not butting in with questions of visiting speakers and talking over students.
* Generally good support. A lack of IT support for getting our lab computers online did cause delays last year.
* I have been frustrated by some of the administrative support. Occasionally hard to receive answers re: scholarship applications, and on one or two occasions my file was "misplaced" briefly.
* I feel well supported. Ancil is always very helpful! There was some difficulties at the transition time, but I feel like things are running smoother.
* I didn't have many chances to get in touch with the Administrative staff, apart for some simple documentations, but for what I needed I've always had great support, from people with great patience and always available to help.
* the support is adequate, and I haven't noticed any change.
* I just started Sept 2014, cannot comment, though I have found the administrative staff and IT staff to be very efficient and helpful in their responses
* Yes
* Yes, I've noticed a shift, and I feel for the current admin having to do the jobs of multiple people. They are very nice and super helpful when I have needed them.
* Overall the department staff is helpful although there has been some noticeable changes since the reduction last year.
* I felt there was adequate support, both before and after September 2013.
* I do no find I have very much support from the department staff but I did not feel that way before 2013.
* I have not been at McGill long enough to compare previous years, but have had no trouble yet.
* Staffing is present where/when required but often staff is overloaded and turnaround/response time is delayed or longer than should be.
* As an international student, I found it remarkably difficult to get the information I needed for my visas and about what I needed to pay out of pocket every semester, I was told I needed to pay thousands of dollars a year and that I (and I directly quote) 'should not come broke'. While this turned out only partially true, I found the way that I was treated was incredibly rude and unprofessional, and I came very close to not even coming. Since I have been here, I have not had many issues (only my stipend not being processed and not being paid for two months), but the current staff is really awesome.
* Yes, I have noticed a significant reduction in staff. Susan Bocti was a very important part of the department, and we miss her dearly.
* No, I do not feel that I have adequate administrative support, and my attempts to deal with issues have been extremely frustrating and unsuccessful. I have noticed a very big change since 2012.
* Graduate student support in the department is very poor. When I started I was surprised how little information was available to new students in the department (especially Winter starting students!). Since Ancil has taken on Susan's duties, I have noticed a negative change. For example, information on scholarship deadlines is rarely made available with sufficient notice, or asking. IT staff is non-existent and I have wasted significant time on issues that I felt should have been dealt with by the department. In my experience, McGill facilities and technical staff are timely in there responses to requests, but expediting jobs to completion is nightmarishly slow.
* I generally try not to ask the graduate student staff for help as I find they do not respond, or do not respond helpfully. However, the Redpath staff who I work with more regularly are very available and helpful.
* I have definitely noticed a reduction of IT support staff. I think that it is a detriment to the department.
* I think the admin and support staff are fantastic. I especially appreciate people like Frank who are more than happy to help with obscure tasks related to equipment and project implementation- something many departments don’t have. One thing about graduate student support- at my previous institution, things like QEs and thesis defenses were scheduled through the grad secretary, including room booking, contacting external members etc. I found it a bit awkward when I was scheduling my QE in that I had to approach my chair and external member and had to do the scheduling, not because I wasn’t willing to do it, but it created a situation where the members became annoyed at each other’s restricted availability and in turn would pass on this discontent to me. I worried that this would create a situation where they resented my attempts at scheduling and would negatively impact their opinion of my QE performance.
* I feel I have had adequate support; sometimes things take longer than one would like but they always get done.
* I was in school during the switchover in 2013. I found the service remained good, but it was a bit more complicated to track down the appropriate person when you needed help with something.

Career preparation

Q6: Career Preparation Do you think that your current program is preparing you for your future career?

* Maybe?
* No, because I do not want to be a professor. Professors at McGill seem to have the attitude that if you don't continue in the university system, then you are a failure. Or they do not know how to prepare students for alternative career choices because those are not the choices they made for themselves. This is a problem across all academics, not just McGill, but I think McGill professors might be worse about it because the university is more prestiguous than other universities. I worry about working so hard to finish my thesis and get papers but then what happens the next day, how do I find a job if I have only been paying attention to my lab and my professor for four years? It isn't encouraged to meet other professionals outside academia, I don't know how I would do it and there isn't support or role models. We don't even know what many prevsious students are doing now, so how would we get in touch with them if they have cool jobs and we would like advice?
* To some extent.
* Hard to know... I think the focus is more academic than some other schools that are more "applied", but that is why we choose McGill, right?
* In some ways yes and some ways no. I am learning a lot about careers in academia. And there are many skills I've learned while doing a PhD, but I do not feel as if I've learned what else I can be doing. Maybe this is not the job of the Biology Department, maybe I should be searching myself. However, it would be nice if I had more access to career information from the department. To be fair, I am not really panning my career at the moment, so I do not really know if there is this kind of information available.
* I hope so. It's definitely giving me new skills. Whether I want to keep going in the same direction is still something that I haven't decided.
* I don't think so, since it seems to assume that we are all going to end up as academics, which most of us won't. Skillsets offers a few workshop on how to transfer skills, but it sill seems like we aren't prepared to get a job outside academia at all. For example, courses required to fulfill the department phd requirements have to be related to your research. However it would be probably more helpful to be allowed to take courses in management for example, or writing/editing, teaching etc. that could be used as tranferrable skills.
* Yes
* Yes
* Sort of. It would be nice to have more workshops on common things grad student's face and on taking the next step. A better integration with CAPS and SkillSets would be useful
* Yes, both in the skills required and in the networking opportunities through conferences
* Not directly, but McGill offers many cources through CAPS that are very helpful.
* I think having a phd will help me get into a better career in the future.
* My current studies and workload are teaching me new skills and giving me information I wouldn't have otherwise obtained.
* Yes. There are opportunities to network, advance skills, develop new skills. Would like to see efforts to promote non-academic networking.
* I think this is where the department needs to change their ways most substantially. I don't think graduate students receive enough support for options outside of academia.
* It depends on what type of position you want in the future. I have not been here long enough to really answer that.
* Yes, in research and little else. There isn't a whole lot of options out there outside of research and academia for a evolutionary ecologist.
* Yes, but more courses, especially stats courses, are desperately needed.
* Skillsets offered by McGill help, but I wish they were offered more frequently and more relevant topics (e.g., more on careers outside academia, less on introductory teaching)
* I think the skills I am gaining will help me obtain a job, but I do not think this institution is helping me much. I went to career services and found it unhelpful and discouraging. Also, I am not interested in staying in academia and find that the only conversation I can have about my future with my supervisor is about how to stay in academia. Furthermore, my desire to obtain more hard skills for a future career (by taking classes, workshops) has generally been discouraged in fear that it will take away from my time to do extra research, which I do not think will improve my qualifications at this point but is more for the benefit of my supervisor's research program.
* Yes, I think that the skills I have gained in the program and the people I have met have prepared me for my future career.
* Not necessarily. I think I am undoubtedly a better scientist, ecologist, communicator, writer, teacher and advocate than I was when I started a PhD. For this I will always be very appreciative. I have also learned very important theory, planning and technical skills. I do feel that I would be adequately prepared for an academic career should I chose to pursue one, however I have taken initiative within my studies to provide myself with many of these skill-generating opportunities. I don’t think that PhD (or MSc) students in the department are being adequately prepared for anything other than academia, unless they are seeking out their own opportunities. This is an important realization for students to make on their own, and I don’t think that the department should hand hold students through this- but I do think that there needs to be a better system for informing students about the realities of graduate study. Doing a PhD for example, in the present form, is not necessarily going to be useful should a student choose to leave academia and not be funnelled into a post-doc. Doing a PhD is essentially a life path, not just a project and I think students are rarely encouraged to reflect on this. I think thesis and project expectations should be managed in such a way by the department and advisors such that students are encouraged to seek out collaborations, work on research assistantships that are not just related to stipends and engage in interdisciplinary ways.
* Hopefully?
* I think there is a strong history in the department of preparing students for an academic career and virtually no resources about jobs in government, industry, non profit, etc. I think this strictly academic focus is part of the department’s culture, and thus it might be hard to incorporate “post-academy” skill development. While I don’t believe grad school is a place for career preparation like a technical school, having resources to make the transition to points beyond would be beneficial. This is especially true given that the hard reality is the vast majority of students will end up in these types of fields, regardless of their academic aspirations.

Quality and effectiveness of graduate program

Q7: Quality and effectiveness of the graduate program Do you have any other comments about the general quality of your graduate student experience?

* I think the quality of the graduate student experience depends a lot on who your supervisor is, how you get along with your labmates, and if you decide to be involved in BGSA activities.
* I am disappointed with the department. I wish I had chosen to go to my second choice university instead as I have heard it is more fun and less competitive than this one. People stay in their labs, professors don't interact much with students outside their lab, there aren't many events with BGSA that are very inclusive other than the big camping trips in fall and winter. I would like to have more consistent interaction between senior and junior students, like monthly meetings about success in grad school, not just presentations. Hardly anyone goes to student presentations in EEL unless the student is popular. And many of the presentations are very very boring and the speaker is poor. A bigger problem in the department is no responsibility about terrible things that have happened between students and professors, for instance one professor is really creepy and sleeps with undergraduate students (and the chair knows about this), another lab where the PI's behavioru is so bad and stresses out the students so they hate them, and even worse one lab where all the students were moved to new supervisors but only after so much damage was done, and its even worse because that professor was not fired. I feel that professors think of students as needing to toughen up or just push through their trouble, or that BGSA will step in and help where the faculty do not (like with teaching statistics in the past). There is not much understanding of student mental health or how society has changed since 40 years ago when they were students. Furthermore, we need more diversity in the department becuase it is mostly white people and that isn't representative of Canada or the graduate students and postdocs that are at McGill. There is no one on my committee who understands what it is like to be away from family and have responsibilities and cultural differences. It is so easy for professors to ignore what is going on in students lives and this is not helpful for the department or for the university BGSA is too clicky and does not do as much as I would like to have the opportunity to participate in or be welcomed. I hope this changes becuase I would not recommend attending the department to my friends and family.
* Generally there is not enough TA hours for the expected work load.
* So far ok. More conversation around supervisory relationships may be warranted, as this is an endless source of frustration for some students.
* I expected more guidance especially at the beginning, but it's probably just because the program is structured very differently from Europe, and I was probably not enough informed on how it works in North American universities.
* It has been a good career building process.
* With changing BGSA execs, there has been a reduction in social events over the last 2 years.
* I feel the success of my graduate experiences (MSc and PhD) have been largely based on my supervisors and the labs I belong to. However, I felt that the Biology Department was a vibrant and supportive environment to be in, and I learnt a lot about subjects outside of my own field through workshops, symposia, retreats and lectures.
* Very positive overall. I learned a great deal, hard and soft skill related.
* Its awesome if you want to do research. Its a great experience so far. The professors are outstanding, the research is world-class, and the graduate students are pretty amazing too.
* I feel that the quality of research is high, but the quality of training, courses, and support are very low.
* The general quality of my graduate student experience can improve if there was less administrative duties involved. Unfortunately, administrative duties required by PI's and students take away from actual research time, and prevents casual interaction time that promotes new ideas. Aside from balancing limited time for research goals, the department can make better efforts to foster inclusive experiences between labs.
* Compared to my previous graduate school experience, I feel that there is a lack of community between graduate students and professors. I felt that I had a lot of role models and positive relationships with professors at my previous school, and I don't find that here. I think this is largely a problem with professors being unavailable to spend time with graduate students (either socially or for work).
* Overall I think my graduate student experience was good. My only issue would be a lack of funding however I recognize that this is the reality of the political situation. I don’t think the the lack of funding is the department’s fault entirely. Although the reduction in TA and TA hours is worrisome.
* Its been good and I am extremely grateful for the level of freedom and flexibility afforded by the program to spend time abroad and work with other labs.