



2025 GPDN-RPESP Annual Conference Schedule

Dates and Times: Monday, November 3, 2025 (12:00 pm - 5:00 pm ET); Tuesday, November 4, 2025 (8:45 am - 5:00 pm ET)

Physical Location: Delta Hotels Ottawa City Centre (Ballroom A), Ottawa, Ontario

Online Location: Zoom

Day 1 (In Person or Online): November 3

Note: in-person and online conference attendees participate in separate concurrent sessions on Day 1.

In-Person Time (ET)	In Person Schedule (Delta Hotels Ottawa City Centre)	Online Time (ET)	Online Schedule (Zoom)
12:00 – 1:00 pm (ET)	Registration & Lunch (included for in-person attendees)	12:00 – 1:00 pm (ET)	
1:00 – 1:50 pm (ET)	Welcoming Remarks & Facilitated Introductions for Professional Development Practitioners Facilitated table discussions introducing practitioners to the GPDN and each other.	1:00 – 1:50 pm (ET)	Welcoming Remarks & Facilitated Introductions for Professional Development Practitioners Facilitated introduction to the GPDN and each other in the online conference space.
2:00 - 2:30 pm (ET)	Break	2:00 – 3:00 pm (ET)	Graduate Professional Development as a Career Facilitated discussion of opportunities and challenges within graduate professional development itself as a career path.



2:30 – 3:30 pm (ET)	Helping Postdocs Navigate the Non-Academic Job Market Panel discussion with Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Administrators (CAPA) and Mitacs on Postdoctoral Career Support.	3:00 – 3:10 pm (ET)	Break
3:30 – 3:45 pm (ET)	Break	3:10 – 4:10 pm (ET)	Key Issues in GradPD Discussion focused on identifying the important current issues in the world of GradPD.
3:45 – 4:50 pm (ET)	Facilitated Professional Development Discussions Facilitators lead participants in open group discussions of relevant topics including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embedding graduate professional development within and across the curriculum (Rebecca Maymon, McGill University)• Developing training materials and providing effective inclusive supports within administrative constraints (Felicia Glatz, University of Calgary)• Using 3MT to maximize opportunities for cross-disciplinary peer learning (Rachael Cayley and Lynn Ossher, University of Toronto)		
6:00 pm (ET)	Dinner (Not Included in Conference Fee) In-person attendees have opportunities to connect over		



	dinner at a local restaurant in Ottawa. We will walk down to The Grand (Pizzeria and Bar), 74 George St., in the ByWard Market for 6 p.m.		
--	---	--	--

Day 2 (Hybrid): November 4

Time (EST)	Session	Details
8:45 – 9:20 am (ET)	Registration	Registration and Breakfast (included for in-person attendees) Coffee and light breakfast served
9:20 – 9:30 am (ET)	Day 2 Welcome	Welcome Short remarks
9:30 – 9:50 am (ET)	Lightning Talk	1 Setting the Stage for Professional Development Discussions Exploring how we characterize the content and range of graduate professional development programming <ul style="list-style-type: none">Defining the Scope of Doctoral Professional Development Joel Rodgers (University of Toronto)
9:50 – 10:00 am (ET)	Break	
10:00 – 11:10 am (ET)	Panel Discussion	2 Making the Case: How Career and Professional Development Professionals Can Communicate Impact A panel discussion on <ul style="list-style-type: none">Emily Bell, Associate Director (Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre)Helen Miliotis, Assistant Professor and Program Director (University of Toronto)Katie George, Program Manager and Research Coordinator (McMaster University)Lorna MacEachern, Associate Director (McGill University)
11:10 – 11:20 am (ET)	Break	
11:20 – 12:00 pm (ET)	Lightning Talks	3 Show Me the Data: Tracking Outcomes and Needs Using quantitative strategies to evaluate impact <ul style="list-style-type: none">2025 Academic Job Market by the Numbers Lisa Aikman (University of Toronto Scarborough) and Gerry Turner (York University)



		<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tracking Impact on a Budget: Using Microsoft Tools to Measure Grad & Postdoc Outcomes Catherine Maybrey (McMaster University)
12:00 – 12:30 pm (ET)	Lunch	Lunch (included for in-person attendees) Buffet served
12:30 – 1:20 pm (ET)	AGM	GPDN Annual General Meeting
1:20 – 1:30 pm (ET)	Break	
1:30 – 2:10 pm (ET)	Lightning Talks	4 Building Support and Resilience into Graduate Programs Prioritizing wellbeing and maintaining connection throughout graduate degrees <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lessons Learned from Graduate (re)Orientation Javier Ibarra-Isassi (Concordia University)● Navigating PhD with Connection and Care: Building Resilient Academic Communities through Doctoral Peer Mentorship Program Racha Cheikh-Ibrahim (Concordia University)
2:10 – 2:30 pm (ET)	Break	
2:30 – 3:10 pm (ET)	Lightning Talks	5 Leveraging Faculty Support in Graduate Professional Development Incorporating faculty involvement in all aspects of graduate programs <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Leveraging Supervisors to Address Career Anxiety in Graduate Trainees through Targeted Mentorship Support Simrit Musallyarakath Arakkal (McGill University), Amélie Bourdieu (McGill University) and Emily Bell (Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre)● Faculty as Collaborators and Leads in Graduate Co-Curricular Programming Joanne Lieu (University of Toronto)
3:10 – 3:15 pm (ET)	Break	
3:15 – 4:15 pm (ET)	Lightning Talks	6 Incorporating Career-Oriented Thinking in Graduate Development Including career preparation throughout the graduate degree <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Enhancing Doctoral Training in Higher Education Administration through Concordia's Doctoral Student Internship Program Maria Kyres (Concordia University)



GPDN
Graduate and Postdoctoral
Development Network

RPESP

Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
études supérieures et postdoctorales

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Preparing PhD Students for Non-Academic Careers through Transferable Skills Identification and Articulation Jessica Wurster (University of Toronto)● ChatGPD: a Professional Development Podcast for Graduate Students and Postdocs in Biomedical Science Pamela Plant (University of Toronto)
4:15 – 5:00 pm (ET)	Closing	Closing Remarks and Discussions Informal discussions of key topics from the conference



Session Abstracts for Day 2

Session 1: Setting the Stage for Professional Development Discussions

Exploring how we characterize the content and range of graduate professional development programming

Defining the Scope of Doctoral Professional Development, Joel Rodgers (University of Toronto)

The scope of professional development for doctoral students is complicated. In its most technical sense, the phrase “professional development” refers to the skills and activities that foster an individual’s success after entering a specific profession or field of work. But doctoral students occupy a liminal career space. They are simultaneously training to be future faculty members and working as early career professionals. They often contribute substantially to their chosen academic fields, even though the vast majority are unlikely to join the ranks of the professoriate. How, then, do we scope the role of “graduate professional development” in ways that account for the realities of doctoral education and employment outcomes?

Given the porous boundaries of graduate professional development, this lightning talk will introduce a competency framework we have drafted for defining the scope of graduate development for university leadership and administration. Whereas many frameworks are student-facing, focusing on building the student’s capacity to identify or hone transferable skills for future non-academic employers, this framework aims to provide a holistic view of graduate development for practitioners looking to identify, build, and assess program offerings. The goal is not only defining the scope of professional development but mapping for faculty and academic leaders how support for graduate development might be coordinated across university offices, encouraging collaboration among the many stakeholders in doctoral education.

Joel Rodgers, PhD, coordinates graduate student professional development in the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of Toronto, where he has held several roles supporting graduate student development over the past 12 years. In addition to developing programming, he works directly with graduate units to create new professional opportunities for graduate students. Outside of his graduate role, he regularly teaches undergraduate courses in English literature at the University of Toronto Scarborough campus.

Session 2. Making the Case: How Career and Professional Development Professionals Can Communicate Impact

This panel explores how career and professional development professionals communicate the value of their work to diverse stakeholders—including institutional leaders, faculty, budget decision-makers, funders, and students. Panelists will share approaches for making the case effectively, including the tools, data, and narratives they rely on. The session will also invite audience input and reflection.

By the end of this session, participants will have:

- Reflected on key audiences and what drives their engagement with career development.
- Gained ideas from peers on how to communicate value effectively.
- Considered new ways to strengthen support within their institutions or with funders.

Panel Members & Programs:

- **Associate Director**
Emily Bell (Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre)
- **Assistant Professor and Program Director**
Helen Miliotis (University of Toronto)
- **Program Manager and Research Coordinator**
Katie George (McMaster)
- **Associate Director**
Lorna MacEachern (McGill University)

Emily Bell, MSc, PhD is Associate Director of the Desjardins Centre for Advanced Training of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre which is responsible for supporting the professional and career development of the approximately 1200 trainees. She directs a growing team of personnel responsible for the support of trainees at The Institute in the life sciences. Emily is currently a principal investigator on CANTRAIN (CIHR funded clinical trial training platform) and Institutional Lead on the McGill-Affiliated TREMPLIN Consortium (FRQ funded professional development network).

Helen Miliotis is an Assistant Professor (Teaching Stream) in the Department of Physiology at the University of Toronto and the inaugural Program Director for the MHSc in Medical Physiology program. Helen obtained her PhD at the Institute of Medical Science at the University of Toronto and has a Certificate of Leadership in Higher Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. In her teaching roles, beyond foundational human physiology courses at the undergraduate level, she teaches graduate students curriculum-embedded professional development with the aim to complement their scientific training with professional skills to be successful after graduation.

After 16 years of experience teaching in higher education and working clinically within the field of brain injury rehabilitation, **Katie George** jumped into the world of postdoctoral education. In her recent appointment as Program Manager at the McCall MacBain Postdoctoral Fellows Teaching and Leadership Program (out of McMaster University), she applies her skills in cognitive science, educational principles and leadership to each incoming cohort. Creating a cohort community of postdocs has been one of the most enriching aspects of this new appointment. She looks forward to what each new academic year brings and how the program can help to shape and evolve the ever-changing world of postdoctoral training.



GPDN **RPESP**

Graduate and Postdoctoral Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
Development Network études supérieures et postdoctorales

Lorna MacEachern serves as the Associate Director of professional development and engagement for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at McGill University. For nearly two decades, she has been dedicated to supporting graduate students and postdoctoral scholars through the challenges of higher education, including the pivotal transition from academic life to a meaningful career. She currently leads SKILLSETS, a portfolio of programs that offer a variety of services and more than 200 workshops annually, addressing key areas such as supervision, goal setting, funding, skills development, wellness, and experiential learning.



Session 3. Show Me the Data: Tracking Outcomes and Needs

Using quantitative strategies to evaluate impact

2025 Academic Job Market by the Numbers,

Lisa Aikman (University of Toronto Scarborough) and Gerry Turner (York University)

What does it take to enter the academic job market in 2025? This lightning talk will share preliminary insights gleaned from cataloguing all academic job postings hosted University Affairs in 2025 (thus far) that are open to recent graduates with terminal degrees. Particular attention will be paid to comparing availability of short- and long-term positions across the disciplines, discussing what application materials are required and looking at how equity is discussed in various job ads. By sharing both our dataset and our preliminary findings, participants will gain an understanding of high-level hiring trends in 2025 and have the chance to request/suggest further areas for analysis.

Lisa Aikman, PhD is an Educational Developer at the University of Toronto Scarborough, where she specializes in graduate student and postdoctoral scholar development. She holds a PhD in Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies from the University of Toronto.

Gerry Turner is a PhD Candidate and Research Assistant in the Department of Language, Literatures, and Linguistics at York University.

Tracking Impact on a Budget: Using Microsoft Tools to Measure Grad & Postdoc Outcomes,

Catherine Maybrey (McMaster)

How can we meaningfully measure and showcase the impact of our professional development strategies on graduate student and postdoctoral outcomes—without access to expensive platforms or institutional systems? This lightning talk explores a practical, low-cost solution using familiar Microsoft 365 tools, including Power Automate, MS Forms, MS Lists, and Outlook. Participants will learn how to build a customizable registration and attendance tracking system that captures key data such as participant demographics (faculty, program level, length of time at institution) and engagement across multiple events.

By automating data collection and communication workflows, this system allows PD practitioners to not only track participation but also connect those metrics to broader institutional outcomes. For example, targeted analysis can identify links between event participation and increased applications to grants and fellowships, or rising altmetrics and public engagement following programs like GradFlix. The approach also enables identification of underserved groups, tailoring of future programming, and compelling reporting to stakeholders and funders.

This session is ideal for PD professionals seeking scalable, efficient ways to demonstrate their impact using tools already available at most institutions. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies to start building their own impact-tracking systems—no coding required.

Following this session, attendees will be able to:



GPDN RPESP

Graduate and Postdoctoral Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
Development Network études supérieures et postdoctorales

- Identify key Microsoft 365 tools (Power Automate, MS Forms, MS Lists, Outlook) that can be used to build a low-cost registration and data tracking system for professional development programs.
- Design a workflow to collect and organize participant data (e.g., attendance, faculty, program level, time at institution) to support outcome-based evaluation.
- Apply data insights to demonstrate program impact, including correlations with increased grant/fellowship applications and enhanced research visibility (e.g., altmetrics), and use findings to inform future programming."

Catherine Maybrey is the Coordinator of Postdoctoral Affairs and Research Training at McMaster University and Director-at-Large with the Graduate & Postdoctoral Development Network (GPDN). With over 15 years of experience in higher education and career development, she leads collaborative programming, delivers research training, and supports career transitions for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.

Session 4. Building Support and Resilience into Graduate Programs

Prioritizing wellbeing and maintaining connection throughout graduate degrees

Lessons Learned from Graduate (re)Orientation, Javier Ibarra-Isassi (Concordia)

As graduate students transition into the independent research and thesis-writing phase of their programs, many encounter a drop in structured support and academic connection. To address this critical gap, Concordia University's School of Graduate Studies launched Thesis Refuel, an integrated initiative designed to support students shortly after completing coursework and comprehensive exams.

This session will explore the structure and early outcomes of Thesis Refuel, including the development of targeted events such as Graduate (Re)Orientation and Thesis Mini-Boost, as well as the creation of discipline-specific workshops and on-demand thesis support resources. We will highlight the benefits of segmenting thesis-stage support from professional development programming, a change that allowed for more focused, skill-specific resources for graduate researchers.

The learning outcomes of the session are (1) identify strategies for designing mid-program reengagement opportunities; (2) understand the role of modular, scalable programming in supporting thesis-stage success; and, (3) apply insights from pilot data and student feedback to inspire other support models. This session offers practical takeaways for institutions looking to strengthen retention, motivation, and academic skill-building during the later stages of graduate education.

Javier Ibarra-Isassi, PhD, is the Coordinator, Graduate Research and Thesis Support at Concordia University. While working towards his PhD in Biology at Concordia he combined his teaching experience with his enthusiasm for skill-sharing and became an academic skills workshop instructor for GradProSkills, focusing on research communication skills. This path then led him to become the program coordinator shortly before defending his PhD thesis. With a passion for knowledge mobilization and translation, he is always looking to find ways to help graduate students develop their skills through workshops, and training programs and events such as Concordia's Public Scholars, writing retreats and more recently, graduate (re)orientation. He currently serves as chair of the Communications Committee of the Graduate and Postdoctoral Development Network.

Navigating PhD with Connection and Care: Building Resilient Academic Communities through Doctoral Peer Mentorship Program, Racha Cheikh-Ibrahim (Concordia)

Mentorship has the potential to transform the doctoral journey by fostering connection, building confidence, and creating a stronger sense of belonging. In Fall 2025, Concordia's School of Graduate Studies will launch the Doctoral Peer Mentorship Program, a pioneering initiative that embeds peer mentorship and leadership into the PhD experience from the outset.

This program connects incoming doctoral students with experienced senior PhD mentors through structured mentorship circles, office hours, and skill-development activities focused on care, community building, and early academic integration. It leverages existing institutional resources and services while addressing ongoing challenges related to doctoral student engagement, well-being, and retention.



GPDN RPESP

Graduate and Postdoctoral
Development Network

Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
études supérieures et postdoctorales

The program's design was guided by cross-campus collaboration, benchmarking with external institutions, consultation with similar internal initiatives, and research on doctoral student outcomes. It embodies GPDN's values of collaboration, adaptability, learner-centred design, and inclusive excellence, while demonstrating a scalable, resource-efficient approach to professional development.

This lightning talk will:

- Describe the program's design, implementation, and integration within a broader graduate ecosystem.
- Share practical strategies for mentor recruitment, training, and evaluation.
- Highlight early impacts, challenges, and lessons learned from the initial implementation phase.
- Explore the role of peer mentorship in fostering doctoral student belonging, improving well-being, and supporting both short- and long-term retention across diverse academic settings.

Racha Cheikh-Ibrahim, MSc, is a higher education professional with over ten years of experience in advancing graduate development through inclusive, evidence-based programs. As a Graduate Professional Development Officer at Concordia University's School of Graduate Studies, she leads impactful programs that foster skill development, peer learning, and transformative leadership experiences for diverse graduate student communities. Her expertise includes program development, training and facilitation, mentorship and coaching, inclusive leadership, and EDIA-informed approaches to student professional growth and meaningful engagement. Racha's work is grounded in a values-driven perspective that emphasizes collaboration, connections, and equitable access to meaningful opportunities for growth. Racha is a Concordia University alumna with a BSc in Biochemistry and an MSc in Chemistry. She is committed to transforming the graduate student experience through community building, reflection, and inclusive practices.

Session 5. Leveraging Faculty Support in Graduate Professional Development

Incorporating faculty involvement in all aspects of graduate programs

Faculty as Collaborators and Leads in Graduate Co-Curricular Programming, **Joanne Lieu (University of Toronto)**

Partnering with faculty members to deliver co-curricular programming offers an avenue for transformative learning experiences, particularly since they are often the first point of contact for students exploring professional development opportunities. Given the vital role that faculty members play in shaping the trajectories of graduate students, it is essential to provide multiple channels for their involvement in informing, designing, and executing co-curricular offerings. This lightning talk will share examples of collaborative initiatives that leverage faculty expertise while respecting their time and service commitments. The session also examines how to create structures that invite sustainable faculty participation, recognizing that these efforts often fall under the umbrella of service work. At the same time, participation in co-curricular activities offers a mutually beneficial opportunity for faculty members to shift and inform their curricular offerings. After attending the session, participants will:

1. Discover practical strategies to build and maintain faculty partnerships in co-curricular programming.
2. Learn how to design flexible, mutually beneficial opportunities for faculty engagement.
3. Explore ways to formally acknowledge and celebrate faculty contributions to graduate student success.

Joanne Lieu, PhD, is the Graduate Professional Development Coordinator at the Institute for Studies in Transdisciplinary Engineering Education and Practice, Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, University of Toronto. She designs and coordinates professional development programs for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Joanne holds a Ph.D., M.Ed., B.Ed., and H.B.Sc from the University of Toronto. Her work centers on the evolving nature of career development in academia. Her recent article, *How being a caregiver changes your graduate school experience*, published in *Responsibilities May Include*, reflects her commitment to supporting graduate students navigating both academic and personal responsibilities during their professional journeys.

Leveraging Supervisors to Address Career Anxiety in Graduate Trainees through Targeted Mentorship Support, **Simrit Musallyarakath Arakkal, Amélie Bourdieu and Emily Bell (McGill)**

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in shaping the career trajectory of graduate students. In 2022, the Tremplin Consortium—composed of McGill-affiliated health research centers—conducted a comprehensive survey on career preparation and professional skill development among doctoral students. The findings were clear: while many students initially pursue graduate studies with the goal of entering academia, 44% of respondents indicated a growing desire to leave the academic track, often accompanied by feelings of frustration, anxiety, and disillusionment. To identify how the research environment could help mitigate this perception and expand PhD students' career horizons, the consortium formed subcommittees to run a series of consultations in 2023. These efforts led to the creation of the Tremplin Ambassador Award in 2024, a strategic initiative aimed at equipping supervisors, postdocs, and research



GPDN RPESP

Graduate and Postdoctoral
Development Network

Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
études supérieures et postdoctorales

staff with concrete financial means to apply their leadership in supporting students in their career and professional development. Seven original projects were funded through the program, which included initiatives such as a translational research podcast, a Toastmasters program, trainee-centered conferences and retreats, directly impacting over 300 students. These activities have convened a strong sense of community among trainees, supervisors, and research staff. Consecutive to what, inspired by the process, a student committee independently organized other networking events. Therefore, the TREMLIN Ambassador program served as a catalyst for further student-led initiatives. The Tremplin Ambassador Award succeeded in offering a program for growth, empowerment, and connection.

Simrit Safarulla is a PhD candidate in Experimental Medicine, where her research focuses on understanding immune cell interactions in the tumor microenvironment. Her work explores how innate and adaptive immune responses can be harnessed to improve cancer immunotherapies, with a particular interest in translational applications of basic immunological principles. She holds an undergraduate degree in Biotechnology Engineering and a master's degree in Bioengineering, which inspired an interdisciplinary approach to research at the interface of biology and engineering.

In addition to graduate studies, Simrit is an active student member of the TREMLIN consortium, helping to organize initiatives that support graduate students in developing professional skills, exploring careers, and connecting across disciplines.

Amélie Bourdieu, MSc (Physiopathology), PhD (Immunology) is the Manager of the TREMLIN consortium, a collaborative initiative of McGill University-affiliated health research centers composed of the DCAT of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, the Lady Davis Institute, the Douglas Research Centre, and the CRBS who have joined forces to design innovative professional and career development activities. Having shared her career between industry and academia, she brings more than 15 years of expertise in health research, including strategic planning, critical thinking and interdisciplinary teamwork. Her leadership has been demonstrated at renowned institutions, including Université Laval and the Research Institute of the McGill Health Centre. Drawing on her experience in the life sciences, she created the Tremplin Ambassador Award, an innovative program enabling supervisors, postdocs, and employees to distinguish themselves in the support offered to students through impactful professional development projects. Her understanding of career exploration in the life sciences is a great asset to her mission.

Emily Bell MSc, PhD is Associate Director of the Desjardins Centre for Advanced Training of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre which is responsible for supporting the professional and career development of the approximately 1200 trainees. She directs a growing team of personnel responsible for the support of trainees at The Institute in the life sciences. Emily is currently a principal investigator on CANTRAIN (CIHR funded clinical trial training platform) and Institutional Lead on the McGill-Affiliated TREMLIN Consortium (FRQ funded professional development network).

Session 6. Incorporating Career-Oriented Thinking in Graduate Development

Including career preparation throughout the graduate degree

Enhancing Doctoral Training in Higher Education Administration through Concordia's Doctoral Student Internship Program, Maria Kyres (Concordia)

Concordia University's Doctoral Student Internship Program (DSIP) bridges doctoral academic training with meaningful professional experience by placing PhD students in part-time, paid internships within university administrative units. Launched in Fall 2024, this initiative responds to the growing need for experiential learning opportunities that expand doctoral career pathways beyond academia. Some of the learning outcomes of the program include: Strengthening transferable skills in communication, project management, and organizational collaboration, gaining exposure to institutional processes, policy development, and decision-making structures within a large university setting, (especially important considering that about 49% of Concordia PhD's end up working in higher education administration) and clarifying personal career goals by providing work experience outside of the traditional academic path. This program is still in its infancy having been in place for only two semesters (Winter 2025 and Summer 2025) so we hope to present our results thus far and have a broader conversation on how we can continue to better serve doctoral students!

Maria Kyres is a career development and HR professional with over 7 years of experience building and maintaining relationships with internal and external partners and 6 years of progressive experience in project management, program development, career planning and guidance, recruitment and sourcing, managing the employee life cycle and advising internal clients. In her current role as a Graduate Career Development Coordinator at Concordia University, she leverages the skills and experience acquired as a HR and Employment Counselling professional, as well as her personal graduate student experience to design and lead career development programs, workshops and career panels for grad students and postdocs.

Preparing PhD Students for Non-Academic Careers through Transferable Skills Identification and Articulation, Jessica Wurster (University of Toronto)

Given the increasing instability of both academic and non-academic job markets, providing PhD students with opportunities to understand and articulate transferable skills gained from their graduate experience (including research, teaching, coursework, and other activities) is an increasingly important function for not just career centres, but all those involved in graduate professional development work. In May 2025, staff from four units at the University of Toronto, including a teaching centre, faculty-based graduate professional development offices, and central career services collaborated to host a PhD Skills Day. This Lightning Talk will provide an overview of the purpose, goals and structure of the event; detail the cross-unit collaborative process in developing PhD Skills Day; and share feedback from event participants.



GPDN RPESP

Graduate and Postdoctoral Réseau pour le perfectionnement aux
Development Network études supérieures et postdoctorales

GPDN session attendees will leave this lightning talk with:

- An understanding of how units supporting graduate professional development build collaboration in a time of resource scarcity; and
- Actionable ideas to support PhD students in transferable skills identification and articulation.

Jessica Wurster, PhD (she/they), is the Graduate Career Educator with Career Exploration & Education (part of the Division of Student Life) at the University of Toronto and has a PhD in Communications Studies from McGill University. She has worked within post-secondary education supporting students through career development and experiential learning for over 10 years, drawing on her experience as an international student and newcomer to Canada.

ChatGPD: a Professional Development Podcast for Graduate Students and Postdocs in Biomedical Science, Pamela Plant (University of Toronto)

Non-Presenting Contributors: Ilakkiah Chandran (University of Toronto), Emily Yeung (University of Toronto), and Chris Zhang (University of Toronto)

ChatGPD (Graduate Professional Development), is a podcast created by students and Faculty at the Institute of Medical Science (IMS) at University of Toronto, to highlight the varied careers of alumni while offering actionable guidance to graduate students as they explore their professional and personal growth.

IMS alumni have excelled in diverse fields, including academia, medicine, public & private sector, and industry. Their success often reflects learning during their time in graduate school, yet many current graduate students remain unaware of these potential career trajectories, and the steps needed to navigate to them through their graduate journeys.

The podcast aims to have a deep impact on current and past biomedical graduate students, helping them become aware of career possibilities, giving them advice from students who have made the transition from graduate school to the working world, while providing inspiration, reassurance and excitement. It promotes connections between our graduate students and alumni, fostering communication and networking. Unlike traditional career panels, the podcast will be a lasting resource that is archived and continuously updated to reflect emerging career trends and alumni achievements. This tool is agnostic to academic Institution or area of specialization and is broadly applicable to any graduate student in biomedical or related fields. The podcast will also be used as a tool for career exploration in the foundational graduate professional development course at IMS.

Pamela Plant, PhD, is currently the Director of Graduate Professional Development at the Institute of Medical Science and an Assistant Professor (Teaching Stream) in the Faculty of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology at the University of Toronto. Here, her portfolio focuses on developing a skills-based curriculum for biomedical centered private and public sector careers, with research focused on student outcomes. Pamela has over 25 yrs cultivating research in translational genomics, most recently as Genomics Specialist and Adjunct Scientist at the Keenan Research Center for Biomedical Science at UnityHealth.