



Healthy Research Teams and Labs Advisory Committee Framework

Council of Graduate Schools



**Healthy Research
Teams & Labs**



Context and Recommendations

Executive Summary

A healthy research culture is a critical factor in conducting high-quality research.¹ While the structure and approach may vary, optimal research cultures are underpinned by collaboration, belonging, creativity, and support.² A positive research environment can elevate the advising and mentorship received by graduate students, and thus, enhance the professional skills developed and the quality of the research produced throughout their studies. Positive research cultures can also be an important factor in graduate student retention, combating burnout, and the overall well-being of research team members.

In the absence of a healthy research culture, the highly competitive nature of research and increased focus on producing research outputs can lead to unrealistic expectations, decreased work-life boundaries, added stress, and diminished well-being for advisors and members of their research teams.³ These circumstances are compounded when advisors are not given formal training and access to resources to help them navigate issues and cultivate a positive research culture.⁴

To address these concerns, institutions have taken a variety of steps to improve the research environment, including the development of educational resources, policies to encourage appropriate conduct, seed funding to support activities that promote healthy practices, and quality assurance processes to innovate programs. Many of these existing initiatives target individual advisor-student relationships or the research environment broadly, with less attention to developing healthy practices within research teams and labs.

With the support of Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) established an advisory committee focused on advancing positive and healthy practices within research teams and labs across CGS member institutions. The advisory committee collaborated to develop the following framework:

- A context document that outlines a shared vision and seven core interconnected values CGS member institutions and advisors can adopt to help cultivate healthy research teams;
- Recommendations for each stakeholder in the graduate community to help recognize and promote healthy practices; and
- A statement of commitment for advisors to demonstrate their commitment to healthy research environments.

Given the CGS mandate, the graduate student experience is the focus of this initiative; however, it is recognized that all members of the graduate community (e.g., academic leaders, advisors, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, staff) contribute to and benefit from a welcoming and healthy environment. This initiative is intended to provide CGS member institutions with guidance and support to foster positive change in their research communities.

*It should be noted that graduate funding was not in the purview of this committee. However, the significant financial challenges faced by graduate students was discussed as an important factor in improving student experience and research cultures.

1,4 Reithmeier, R. & Williams, S. (2020). [Promoting a Healthy Lab Culture at the University of Toronto](#).

2 Burroughs-Wellcome Fund & HHMI. (2006). [Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty](#).

3 Burroughs-Wellcome Fund & HHMI. (2006).