



## **Skills Development for Ph.D. Students: Pedagogical Shifts and Culture Change**

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### **Abstract**

Historically, to a great extent, the form and substance of Ph.D. education has been guided by the assumption that doctoral students are preparing for research and teaching careers in academia. It is recognized increasingly, however, that many Ph.D. graduates pursue careers outside of university, in a wide range of sectors and settings. Many factors influence the placement rate of Ph.D. graduates in tenure-stream university jobs, but it is commonly noted that in some instances it may be at best 30%, and quite often much lower. Since this trend is expected to continue, it is important for universities to re-conceptualize Ph.D. education and ensure that graduates, in addition to their academic training, are prepared for non-academic careers as well. This challenge is often termed “skills development” for Ph.D. students, and includes such topics as communication, self-awareness, entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer and social responsibility.

This paper reflects on the early experience of York University – Canada’s third largest university, with 54 graduate programs - in addressing the need for skills development. The experience includes collaboration with international initiatives such as TRANSDOC (with support from the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Commission), pilot training courses, and survey of initiatives at other Canadian universities. Challenges and barriers are discussed, with a focus on culture change and pedagogical shifts.