

# 2012-2013 ADSA Survey Results

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## Introduction and Methodology

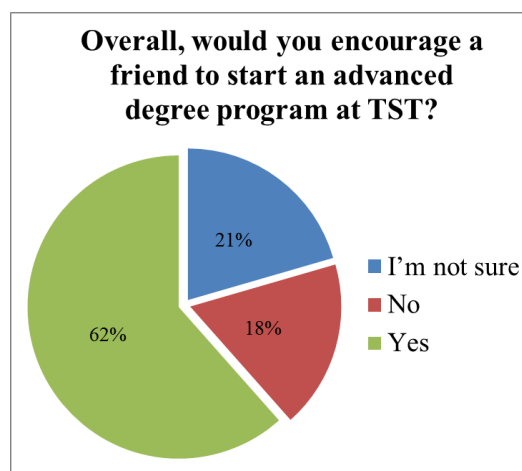
From December 4, 2012 to January 19, 2013 the Advanced Degree Students' Association (ADSA) surveyed advanced degree students at the Toronto School of Theology (TST) about ThD/PhD transfers, degree completion times, and overall satisfaction. To encourage an enthusiastic response, the ADSA offered to draw a \$50 gift certificate to Crux Books for every 50 students who completed the survey and entered the draw. The e-mail addresses used for the draw were then detached from the results to ensure anonymity. The survey was prepared with SurveyMonkey.com and distributed through the TST listserv and ADSA Facebook group. Out of about 270 students reached by these lists, 88 responded, for an impressive 33% response rate.

## Executive Summary

71 of the students surveyed were in a doctoral program, and of those, 68% intend to graduate with a PhD rather than a ThD. The top reason for enrolling in the ThD was lower tuition for domestic students. The top reason for preferring to graduate from the PhD was better recognition in the field.

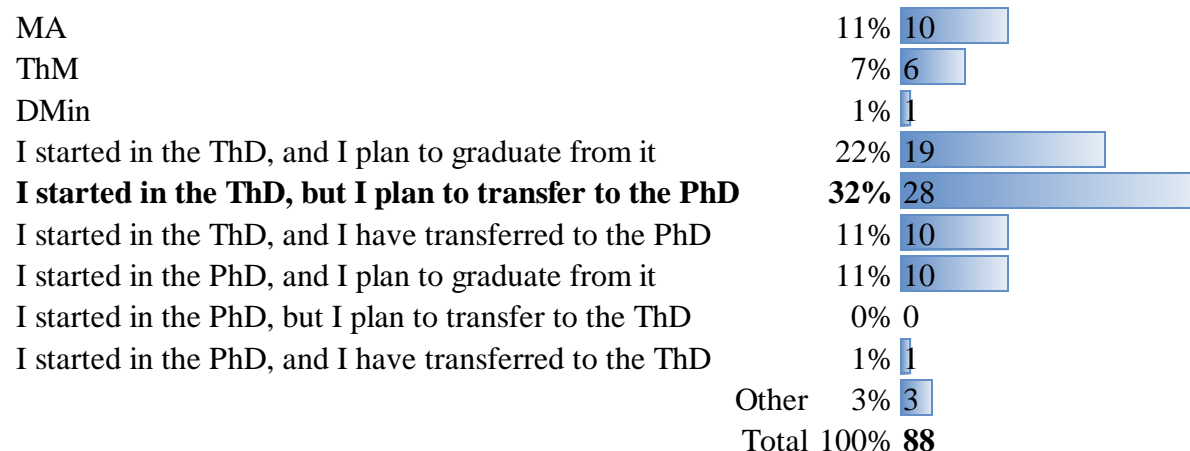
Funding and employment, family care and health, and committees and supervision were the most common factors identified as delaying progress through the program, while registrars, course and module requirements, and language requirements were the least common. Completing languages in advance, having sufficient funding, and not needing to work were the most common factors cited for accelerating progress.

62% of students surveyed would recommend TST to a friend, 18% would not, and 21% were not sure. Consistent areas of concern identified by students included poor communication from faculty and administration, too many students for adequate supervision, and slow progress through the degree.



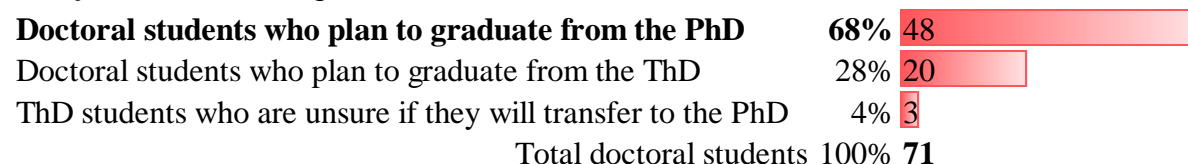
## Questions and Results

### 1. Which advanced degree program are you in? (required)



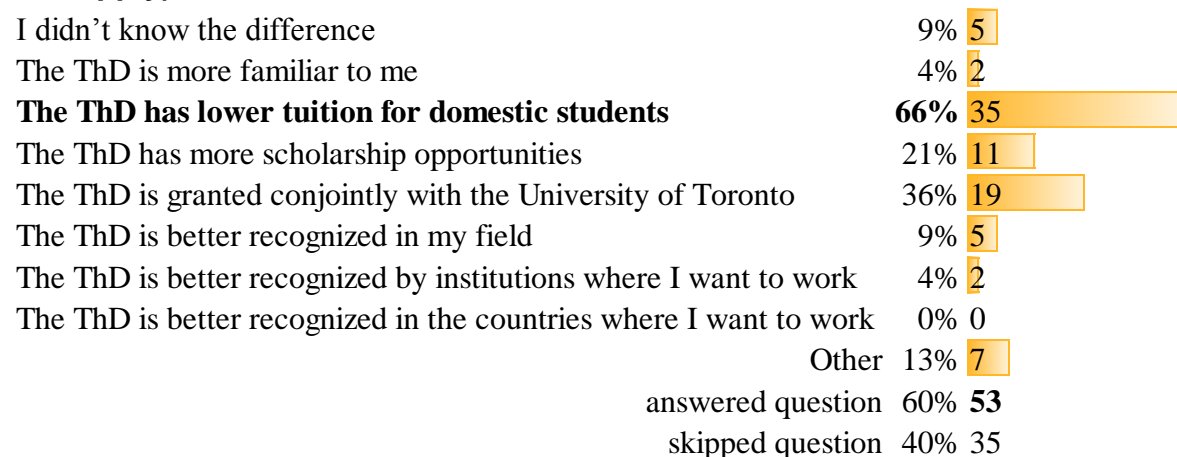
2 of the students who chose “other” stated they had started in the ThD and were unsure if they would transfer to the PhD. The third student explained “I started in the ThD and wanted to transfer to the PhD but now understand that is no longer possible.”

### Analysis: Doctoral degree intentions



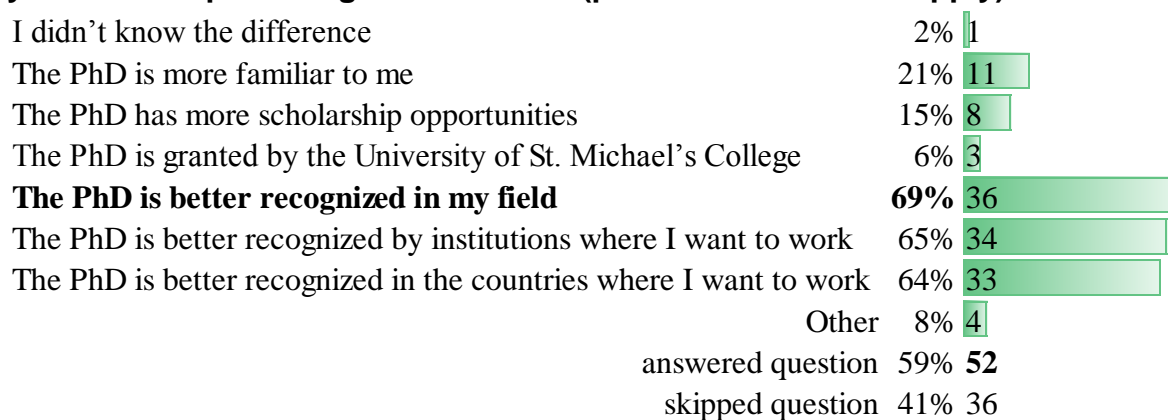
When these doctoral degree intentions are tallied, a clear majority prefer to graduate with a PhD.

### 2. If you were enrolled in, are currently enrolled in, or plan to transfer to the ThD, what reasons did or do you have for choosing it over the PhD? (please check all that apply)



Four students said they chose the ThD because their college did not offer the PhD. Other reasons given for preferring the ThD included a transfer at this stage being “too complex, expensive and time consuming,” liking “the option of doing a PhD somewhere else in the future,” and wanting “a degree in theology, not philosophy.”

### 3. If you are currently enrolled in or plan to transfer to the PhD, what reasons do you have for preferring it to the ThD? (please check all that apply)

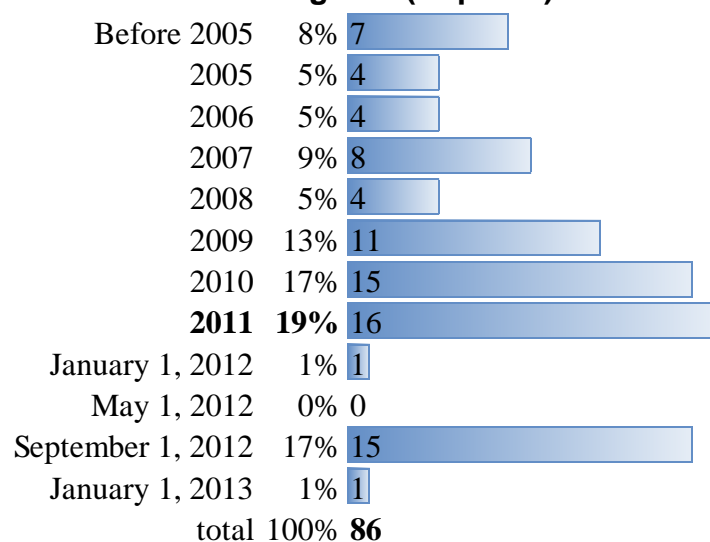


Other reasons specified for preferring the PhD included equivalent tuition for international students.

#### *Analysis: Top reasons for choosing the ThD or PhD*

Overall, the top reason for choosing the ThD was lower tuition for domestic students. The top reason for choosing the PhD was better recognition in the field.

### 4. Excluding transfers between the ThD and the PhD, when did you start your current advanced degree? (required)



Most survey respondents had started their degree in the last four years, but some started over eight years ago.

### 5. Have any of the following factors delayed your progress through your program? (please check all that apply)

<b>Not having sufficient funding</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>32</b>
Working other jobs on or off campus	39%	27
Caring for family members	37%	26
Waiting for supervisory committees to meet	26%	18
Working as a TA, RA, or sessional lecturer	24%	17
Working for a church or other ministry organization	23%	16
Physical and/or mental health challenges	23%	16
Changes in committee members and/or supervisor	16%	11
Waiting for feedback on comprehensive exams, thesis proposals, or thesis drafts	16%	11
Multiple revisions to comprehensive exams, thesis proposals, or thesis drafts	13%	9
Long commute to school	11%	8
Waiting to receive course grades from faculty	11%	8
Close personal loss or death	9%	6
Committee members going on sabbatical	9%	6
Disagreements between committee members	7%	5
Waiting to receive funding you have been promised	6%	4
Problems completing language requirements	6%	4
Problems completing course or module requirements	3%	2
Problems or disagreements with TST registrars	0%	0
Other	11%	8
answered question	81%	70

Other factors students cited for delaying their progress included poor supervision, failure to respond to e-mails, waiting up to 6 weeks for committee meetings, contradictory statements about process and progress, and changes in procedure.

Overall, funding and employment, family care and health, and committees and supervision were the main categories of factors contributing to delayed progress. Registrars, course and module requirements, and language requirements were the least cited factors.

## 6. Have any of the following factors accelerated your progress through your program? (please check all that apply)

<b>Completing 1 language requirement before starting your degree</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>27</b>
Having sufficient funding	32%	22
Not needing to work	28%	19
Completing 2 language requirements before starting your degree	27%	18
Living on campus	19%	13
Completing 3 or more language requirements before starting your degree	18%	12
Receiving 2 advanced standing or transfer credits towards your degree	7%	5
Receiving 1 advanced standing or transfer credit towards your degree	6%	4
Receiving 3 advanced standing or transfer credits towards your degree	2%	1
Other	7%	5
answered question	79%	68

Other factors cited for accelerating progress were having some funding and studying with professors who are flexible with deadlines for completing courses.

Overall, completing languages in advance, having sufficient funding, and not needing to work were the most commonly cited factors that accelerated progress.

## 7. Are you a domestic or an international student? (required)

<b>I am and always have been a domestic student</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>60</b>
I started as an international student, and I am now a domestic student	4%	3
I started as an international student, and I plan to become a domestic student	4%	3
I am and will graduate as an international student	18%	14
Total	100%	80

Most of the students surveyed were domestic.

## 8. Overall, would you encourage a friend to start an advanced degree program at TST? (optional)

I'm not sure	21%	16
No	18%	14
<b>Yes</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>48</b>
Total	100%	78
left comments	29%	23

78 students answered this question, and 29% left comments. 6 comments were unequivocally positive, 7 were clearly negative, and 9 were mixed. Some of the positive comments included:

- A lot of the professors from TST were the best teachers and mentors in my life who pursue academic excellence and at the same time were very caring of their students.

- I especially appreciate the administrators and the faculty at my home college.
- I really like the faculty, the library resources, the ecumenical environment of TST and the secular university environment at U of T.
- I'm a big fan of TST. I've always had great experience with faculty, library and IT support is top notch.
- The advanced-degree programs help us to hone our skills for good jobs and to find meaningful work.
- TST consortium approach is very valuable.

Negative comments included:

- As an international student, it is not practical to study PhD or ThD in North America.
- I think TST has much room to grow in communicating with students about the transitions happening right now. ... There are so many barriers to timely and happy completion of degrees here that I wouldn't recommend it to anyone else.
- I would encourage them to apply to a school with full funding of the program and with a realistic AD faculty/student ratio.
- There are too many committees shepherding a student through the process which compromises that process when individual members of committees are tardy in response or indifferent to the length of time it might take to advance through the stages of the degree.
- There is not an adequate opportunity to get teaching experience from this program, which has been a big hindrance for me on the job market.
- TST has too many problems ... governance, funding, availability of TA positions, adequate supervisor/committee support, and the lack of focus on the desired thesis topic during the coursework and comprehensive phases of the program.
- TST is very bad at informing its students what to expect with all the changes that are coming.

Mixed comments included:

- Depends on what their area is and what they want to do with the degree.
- I would advise them to get clarity on the upcoming changes in the programme.
- I would encourage them to wait until the new PhD program has been released and the uncertainty around the existing programs is settled.
- It depends on what the field of study is. ... If however they want to do something that is confessionally specific, then I might suggest they go somewhere else.
- It is a very lengthy program, and unless I'm certain the person who I am giving the recommendation to is able to persevere then I'm more apt to suggest going to a European university.
- Right now, I would say no. With changes in funding and admitting fewer doctoral students so faculty resources weren't stretched to the limit, I'd say yes.

- The childcare funding and maternity/parental leaves are seriously lacking.
- They must do so in full knowledge of how difficult ... it is to complete an advanced degree financially, mentally, emotionally, and in terms of family.
- We should be offering a specific course in feminist theologies.

Overall, concerns with communication, faculty/student ratio, and time to completion were common themes in the comments on this question.

Finally, only 62% of current students surveyed would encourage a friend to start an advanced degree at TST. Although the question is worded differently, this level of satisfaction is significantly less than the 88% of 2002-2008 graduates who said they would “definitely” or “probably” choose to study at TST again.<sup>1</sup> This may indicate a recent decline in the perceived quality of TST.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is available at <http://www.tst.edu/content/indicators-educational-effectiveness-tst>