

2013-2014 ADSA Survey Results

Introduction and Methodology

From December 4, 2013 to January 15, 2014 the Advanced Degree Students' Association (ADSA) polled advanced degree students about ThD/PhD transfers, funding levels, academic and non-academic activities, wait times, negative experiences, 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. 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 mailing list. Out of 330 students currently registered, 91 responded, for a 28% response rate. (Last year about 270 students were reached and 88 responded.)

Questions and Results

1. Which is your home college? (required)

	all students	surveyed
Emmanuel	52 16%	13 14%
Knox	42 13%	6 7%
Regis	57 17%	14 15%
St. Michael's	59 18%	14 15%
Trinity	33 10%	12 13%
Wycliffe	88 27%	32 35%
Total	330 100%	91 100%

When compared to head counts for 2013-14 provided by TST registrar Diane Henson, Knox students were underrepresented (-6%) and Wycliffe students were overrepresented (+9%) in our survey, while students from the other colleges were within 3% of their actual proportions.

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

	2012-13	2013-14
MA	10 11%	14 15%
ThM	6 7%	2 2%
DMin	1 1%	12 13%
I started in the ThD, and I plan to graduate from it	19 22%	17 19%
I started in the ThD, but I hope to transfer to the conjoint PhD		19 21%
I started in the ThD, but I plan to transfer to the non-conjoint PhD	28 32%	11 12%
I started in the ThD, and I have transferred to the non-conjoint PhD	10 11%	7 8%
I started in the non-conjoint PhD, and I plan to graduate from it	10 11%	6 7%
I started in the non-conjoint PhD, but I hope to transfer to the conjoint PhD		1 1%
I started in the non-conjoint PhD, but I plan to transfer to the ThD	0 0%	0 0%
I started in the non-conjoint PhD, and I have transferred to the ThD	1 1%	0 0%
Other	3 3%	2 2%
Total	88 100%	91 100%

One student stated they started in the ThD and were finishing in the ThM, while the other said they started in the ThD and "still don't entirely understand new PhD options." Both were counted as doctoral students for the purposes of analysis in later questions.

The jump in DMin students from last year may be partly due to the expanded scope of the mailing list.

Analysis: desired doctoral degree by year of program

	year 1	year 2+	any
Doctoral students who plan to graduate from the non-conjoint PhD	0 0%	24 48%	24 39%
Doctoral students who plan to graduate from the conjoint ThD	3 27%	14 28%	17 28%
Doctoral students who hope to graduate from the conjoint PhD	8 73%	12 24%	20 33%
Total	11 100%	50 100%	61 100%

Questions about the conjoint PhD were added to this year’s survey. Unsurprisingly a majority of first-year doctoral students hope to graduate from the conjoint PhD, but so do 11 students who started before 2013. Still, half of the doctoral students from prior years plan to graduate from the non-conjoint PhD.

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

One MA and one DMin student reported starting in 2009, and one MA student reported starting in 2007! All other students who began before 2010 were in the ThD or PhD program.

As would be expected, the number of students who report starting in 2010 and every year before 2008 has decreased when compared to last year’s survey. However, more students reported starting in 2008, 2009, and 2012 than last year, perhaps because more of them are being reached by the mailing list.

The student who started Winter 2013 was considered to be in their second year for analysis purposes.

	2012-2013	2013-2014
Before 2004	7 8%	2 2%
2004	1 1%	1 1%
2005	4 5%	2 2%
2006	4 5%	1 1%
2007	8 9%	2 2%
2008	4 5%	8 9%
2009	11 13%	12 13%
2010	15 17%	11 12%
2011	16 19%	13 14%
2012	16 19%	18 20%
Winter 2013	1 1%	1 1%
Spring/Summer 2013		3 3%
Fall 2013		17 19%
Winter 2014		0 0%
total	86 100%	91 100%

Analysis: doctoral students by college and year of program

When doctoral students in later years are broken out by college, Wycliffe has the most who report starting in 2008 or 2009, followed next by St. Michael’s.

However, two students each from Regis, Trinity, and Wycliffe report starting in 2007 or earlier, while no students from Knox or St. Michael’s admitted to being in year 7 or later.

	year 1&2	year 3&4	year 5&6	year 7+
Emmanuel	2 7%	7 30%	3 16%	1 14%
Knox	4 15%	1 4%	1 5%	0 0%
Regis	3 11%	5 22%	1 5%	2 29%
St. Michael’s	1 4%	5 22%	5 26%	0 0%
Trinity	3 11%	3 13%	1 5%	2 29%
Wycliffe	14 52%	2 9%	8 42%	2 29%
Total	27 100%	23 100%	19 100%	7 100%

Of course, students from earlier years may have lapsed or be less likely to complete the survey.

4. In the past twelve months, roughly how much financial support have you received from bursaries, scholarships, and teaching and research assistantships, excluding non-academic employment? (Round to the closest amount)

	all	Master's	DMin	ThD/PhD
Nothing	23 25%	7 44%	5 42%	11 17%
Less than \$500	1 1%			1 2%
\$500 to \$1,500	2 2%		1 8%	1 2%
\$2,000 to \$4,000	19 21%	4 25%	3 25%	12 19%
\$5,000 to \$8,000	18 20%	2 13%	2 17%	14 22%
\$9,000 to \$13,000	7 8%		1 8%	6 10%
\$14,000 to \$19,000	8 9%	1 6%		7 11%
\$20,000 to \$26,000	7 8%	2 13%		5 8%
\$27,000 to \$34,000	3 3%			3 5%
\$35,000 to \$43,000	3 3%			3 5%
More than \$45,000	0 0%			
Total	91 100%	16 100%	12 100%	63 100%

Over 40% of MA, ThM, and DMin students reported receiving less than \$2,000 in financial support the past year, as did 21% of ThD and PhD students.

On the other hand, about 40% of ThD/PhD students reported receiving between \$2,000 and \$8,000, about 20% reported receiving \$9,000 to \$19,000, and 11 prosperous doctoral students (and two master's students!) reported over \$20,000 in funding this past year.

Analysis: financial support received by college, doctoral students only

	Emmanuel	Knox	Regis	St. Mike's	Trinity	Wycliffe	all doctoral
Nothing			7 64%	1 9%	2 22%	6 24%	16 21%
Less than \$500				1 9%			1 1%
\$500 to \$1,500	1 8%	1 17%					2 3%
\$2,000 to \$4,000	1 8%	2 33%		1 9%	3 33%	8 32%	15 20%
\$5,000 to \$8,000	1 8%	1 17%	1 9%	4 36%	2 22%	7 28%	16 21%
\$9,000 to \$13,000	2 15%		1 9%	1 9%		3 12%	7 9%
\$14,000 to \$19,000	3 23%	1 17%	1 9%	1 9%	1 11%		7 9%
\$20,000 to \$26,000	2 15%	1 17%			1 11%	1 4%	5 7%
\$27,000 to \$34,000	3 23%						3 4%
\$35,000 to \$43,000			1 9%	2 18%			3 4%
More than \$45,000							
Total	13 100%	6 100%	11 100%	11 100%	9 100%	25 100%	75 100%

After excluding DMin students from this analysis, over half (8/11) of the ThD and PhD students surveyed at Emmanuel reported receiving more than \$14,000 of financial support this past year, while half (4/8) of the ThD and PhD students surveyed at Regis reported receiving nothing.

ThD and PhD students at other colleges most typically reported funding within the \$2,000 to \$8,000 range, regardless of whether DMin students were included.

5. Have you benefited from undertaking any of the following academic activities?

6. Have any of the following experiences delayed your progress through your program?

(Check all that apply)

	5.	6.
<i>Questions 5 and 6</i>		
Editing a collected volume or journal issue	4 5%	
Organizing a conference	9 12%	4 6%
Preparing applications for major scholarships or grants	29 40%	14 21%
Preparing for and speaking at conferences or other academic venues	37 51%	11 16%
Serving as a student representative on an ADSA, TST or college committee	18 25%	5 7%
Submitting articles for publication in peer reviewed journals	19 26%	5 7%
Taking more than the required number of courses for credit	12 16%	
Taking non-credit courses in your area of research or to develop academic skills	21 29%	5 7%
Travelling to and attending conferences in your field	43 59%	7 10%
Working as a sessional lecturer or adjunct faculty	12 16%	
<i>Working as a sessional or adjunct less than an hour from campus</i>		5 7%
<i>Working as a sessional or adjunct over an hour from campus</i>		3 4%
Working as a teaching or research assistant	31 42%	13 19%
Working in another capacity related to your field	22 30%	10 15%
Writing a book or book chapter	8 11%	
Writing book reviews or other non-refereed articles	22 30%	
Writing proposals for conference presentations, papers, or panels	38 52%	9 13%
Other	2 3%	11 16%
<i>Question 6 only</i>		
Ambiguity or obscurity in TST policies or procedures		
Being unable to afford paying for both tuition and living necessities		13 19%
Being unable to take a leave of absence because of health insurance needs		
Commuting over an hour to campus		5 7%
Doing paid work for 10-20 hours a week		16 24%
Doing paid work for 20-40 hours a week		13 19%
Doing paid work for more than 40 hours a week		8 12%
Family care		28 41%
Mental health challenges		6 9%
Moving to new accommodations		18 26%
Physical health challenges		8 12%
Significant changes in TST policies or procedures		
Working for a church or other Christian organization		20 29%
Working for a non-governmental organization or volunteer group		2 3%
answered question	73	68

The most common experience reported as delaying progress was family care (41%), followed by working for a church or other Christian organization (29%) and moving to new accommodations (26%). Out of the specifically academic activities, preparing applications for major scholarships or grants (21%) and working as a teaching or research assistant (19%) were most often cited as causing delays.

Other beneficial academic activities mentioned were chairing a seminar (1) and working for an affiliated centre at TST (1). Other sources of delays mentioned were issues with supervisors and committees (5) and challenges with language courses and exams (2).

Analysis: key CV-building activities by year of program, ThD and PhD students only

	year 1 & 2	year 3	year 4	year 5+
Preparing for and speaking at conferences or other academic venues	3 15%	6 67%	8 89%	16 64%
Submitting articles for publication in peer reviewed journals	2 10%	1 11%	4 44%	8 32%
Working as a sessional lecturer or adjunct faculty	1 5%	0 0%	2 22%	9 36%
Working as a teaching or research assistant	3 15%	5 56%	3 33%	19 76%
Total Students	20	9	9	25

When participation in four key CV-building activities are broken out by year for ThD and PhD students, most students who started in 2010 or earlier have benefited from speaking at conferences, while over half of those who started in 2011 or before 2010 have worked as a teaching or research assistant.

However, even of those long-standing students, only a third have submitted journal articles for publication, and about 36% have worked as a sessional lecturer or adjunct faculty, while in years 3 & 4 these proportions are lower, aside from a jump in fourth year students who have submitted articles.

Further analysis not included here reveals enormous variation in academic activities by college.

7. Which is the longest you have had to wait for each of the following?

	<2 weeks	3-6 weeks	2-4 months	5-8 months	9-12 months	over a year	not applicable
A grade on a course or a final course paper	2	10	7	4	1	2	5
A needed language course or exam	3	3	5	1			18
A professor willing to supervise you	11	2	1	1			14
A requested meeting with your advisor or supervisor	19	5		1			5
A required or requested meeting with your committee	9	11	2				8
A decision about or change in committee members or examiners	5	1	2				22
A decision on a comprehensive exam reading list or grade	5	8	1				16
Feedback on a thesis proposal or chapter	5	4	2				19
A decision on a thesis grade or defence	1	2	2				25
answered question	31						

The longest wait times were reported for final course and course paper grades, followed by language courses and exams. Other wait times were generally less than 2 months.

8. Have you experienced any of the following at the Toronto School of Theology? (check all that apply)

Abuse, including bullying, intimidation, or otherwise threatening behaviour	5	6%
Discrimination based on age, disability, gender, race, or sexual orientation	6	7%
Discrimination based on theological perspective or religious practice	10	12%
Pressure to commit academic misconduct or overlook the misconduct of others	2	2%
Pressure to do paid work at unreasonable times or for unreasonable lengths of time	4	5%
Sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual advances or comments	0	0%
answered question		21 (%s out of 86)
left comments		15

These questions were based on a recurring survey of University of Toronto graduate students conducted by the UTGSU. Compared to their 2011 results,¹ TST students appeared to be less likely to report sexual harassment or pressure to work at unreasonable times or for unreasonable lengths of time, but about equally likely to report abuse, discrimination, and pressure to commit academic misconduct. Of the comments, 4 described experiences of discrimination based on theological perspective and religious practice, 2 described experiences of sexism, and 2 described bullying or threatening behaviour.

9. Overall, would you encourage a friend to start an advanced degree program at TST?

86 students answered this question, and 71% would encourage a friend to attend TST, a 9% increase over the level reported in 2012-13. Further analysis shows considerable variation by degree program, college, and starting year.

Analysis: "Would encourage" by degree program

	all	MA	ThM	DMin	ThD/PhD	Three-quarters of MA and DMin students would recommend TST, as would both ThM students, compared to only about two-thirds of ThD and PhD students.
Yes	61 71%	10 77%	2 100%	9 75%	40 68%	
No	7 8%				7 12%	
I'm not sure	18 21%	3 23%		3 25%	12 20%	
Total	86 100%	13 100%	2 100%	12 100%	59 100%	

Analysis: "Would encourage" by college

	Emmanuel	Knox	Regis	St. Michael's	Trinity	Wycliffe	90% of Wycliffe students would recommend TST, but less than half of Emmanuel students would.
Yes	5 42%	4 67%	9 69%	9 69%	7 58%	27 90%	
No	2 17%		2 15%	2 15%	1 8%		
I'm not sure	5 42%	2 33%	2 15%	2 15%	4 33%	3 10%	
Total	12 100%	6 100%	13 100%	13 100%	12 100%	30 100%	

¹ This study is available at <http://www.utgsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/HDAdocapr-1.pdf>

Analysis: "Would encourage" by year

	all	year 1	year 2	year 3	year 4	year 5+
Yes	61 71%	20 100%	8 44%	10 77%	6 60%	17 68%
No	7 8%		2 11%	1 8%	1 10%	3 12%
I'm not sure	18 21%		8 44%	2 15%	3 30%	5 20%
Total	86 100%	20 100%	18 100%	13 100%	10 100%	25 100%

Every student who started in 2013 would recommend TST, but less than half of those who started in 2012 would, and an equal number from that year answered "I'm not sure." Students from earlier years answered in proportions closer to the overall average.

Analysis: comments

19 students left comments on this question. 3 comments were clearly positive, 8 comments were clearly negative, and 6 were mixed.

Positive comments included:

- Of course!
- Incredible research opportunities and many course options due to the number of participating colleges and the congenial spirit between them.
- Tremendous academic resources, good financial support and leadership in my college and program - gives one confidence in my degree at TST.

Negative comments included:

- A lot of the coursework in the MA is a waste of time; there are a ton of **other courses** that TST offers that would be way more helpful.
- As a distance student I find there are very **few course options** and little interaction with instructors. I would find it hard to recommend the DMin program to other students who do not live in Toronto.
- I have no idea what the new program is going to entail. If it is very much like the current one, I would not encourage them to do so. If they address a number of systematic issues, I would be more likely to do so. That said, none of these "**improvements**" will benefit me and mostly just remind us of the well-known problems at TST.
- I would like to see more professors with current ministry experience teaching.
- The **lack of concern** shown to those students who enrolled previous to the new joint PhD program bothers me and tells me that the TST admin is not willing to go to bat for their students with the U of T.
- The program has been unable to support me in my studies. The **changes** in the program have driven so much of the attention of the schools away from the courses that they have and into development of new courses for the new program. Further the school seems to have **lost the goal of its students** and looks only to what makes a better name for itself, discounting the fact that the quality of its students play a big part in its reputation.

- There needs to be some thought given to developing an advanced degree program in Orthodox studies. ... It is disappointing that TST has Orthodox faculty who cannot serve as my advisor, and that the Orthodox courses are not the proper level for me to take them.
- TST at times operates like the large, cumbersome, hierarchical, administrative-laden institution it is. ... Obtaining timely access to advisors/committee members can be challenging and the committee heavy structure can slow the pace of work down considerably, or increase student anxiety unnecessarily. ... I have received very little feedback and direction during key times (i.e. comp writing) which leaves a student very vulnerable if they don't proceed correctly. There are times, as a student, that **I have been made to feel very much like a nuisance, or source of revenue**, rather than a welcomed member of the academic community.

Mixed comments included:

- Though I have encountered challenges while at TST, it is still an excellent school to pursue theological studies. Furthermore, I have accepted that no matter what career one chooses, there will always be difficulties along the way. That is why, even though I feel I have been discriminated against on occasion, I would still recommend the school.
- It would depend on the program
- I would not suggest the current program, but who knows if the **new** one is good or not? The admin has not done a good job **letting us know** what it will look like in a few years.
- Institutionally and administratively, the TST feels **remote and often indifferent** to student needs. While many faculty and colleges do a great job teaching and training, the TST has proven itself **unable or unwilling to communicate** with, respond to, or even take seriously its own students.
- There is so much "not-good" stuff going on right now especially with **all the upcoming changes**, it tends to overshadow the really great things that TST is capable of.
- Yes, but it would depend heavily on their area of interest/research.

Overall, **course options for distance & MA students**, **changes**, and **a lack of care or concern for students** were common themes in the comments on this question. For comparison, in last year's survey the most common themes were concerns with communication, faculty/student ratio, and time to completion.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Many conclusions could be drawn from this survey, but three areas in particular stood out as we considered the data together with last year's survey and our discussions this past year.

First, the new PhD continues to be a major source of interest, confusion, and concern. One-third of the doctoral students surveyed hope to graduate from the conjoint PhD, but half of them started before 2013, and so many may be disappointed. At the same time, many comments on the last question express uncertainty about the changes and fear that existing students have been abandoned. Implementing the graduate centre and communicating more details about the "bridge" program in the coming year should help. However, perhaps even more could be done to visibly demonstrate how the ongoing changes will benefit current students. For example, clear improvements in policy or procedures made for the new program could be applied to old programs and announced as such on the mailing list. Public reassurances about the academic quality and reputation of the current degree programs could also help.

Second, although money is always a perennial challenge for TST students, we were surprised and dismayed by the number of students who reported receiving less than \$2000 in the last year and/or being unable to afford both tuition and living necessities. Of course, funding is also a top concern for the school itself, and we appreciate that TST and the colleges already give close to a million dollars a year in financial aid. Aside from the amount of aid, though, students may have reason to suspect certain colleges or programs have more access to funding than others. Posting minimum funding packages on college websites will help, as would TST administration of travel bursaries, but one further innovation that could improve access to funding and the appearance of fairness would be to keep a repository of winning OGS and SSHRC proposals. Either all students or just students who agree to share their proposal if it succeeds could be given access to private TST Blackboard group administered by the AD office and/or the ADSA, allowing them to see a variety of examples of strong applications, not just one or two each fall at the OGS/SSHRC workshop.

Finally, although many students are presenting at conferences and working as TAs, the low participation in other key CV-building activities is worrying. Even when considering only students in their fifth year or later, only 32% reported benefitting from submitting articles for publication and 36% from working as a sessional or adjunct lecturer. Yet as Jerry Skira and Mark Toulouse emphasized in last fall's professional development seminar, publishing and teaching experience is vital for getting an academic job. Therefore, as TST works to develop a stronger research culture and better balance of research, teaching, and supervision among faculty, we hope to work together to encourage student research and teaching. One good first step could be to officially measure student presentations, publications, and teaching through either the co-curricular record, the proposed student profiles on the TST website, and/or adding questions to the annual full-time/part-time status declaration forms. Another idea is that TST or the colleges could announce the process and deadline to propose summer session courses every year via the mailing list, so all students know they have that option when they reach the candidacy stage.

Of course, as for faculty, the responsibility for building a fulsome CV ultimately lies with the individual student; our concern is simply that research and teaching are not forgotten amid the push to produce graduates. And on that point, it is unclear that students in the new PhD will be any more able to present, publish, or teach while trying to complete their degree in a mere four years. Therefore, unless the new program has full funding or a dramatically lower workload, we suspect many students will continue to face difficult choices about balancing family, finances, and the quality of their academic preparation.