Ripples, Waves, and Tides: AGES and Graduate Student Engagement at the University of Victoria in the Faculty of Education

by

Susan Corner
B.F.A., University of Victoria, 1979

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to develop a clearer understanding of how involvement with the Association of Graduate Education Students (AGES) at the University of Victoria effects students' experiences of graduate school. Participants included graduate students who belonged to the AGES committee between 2001 and 2005 and faculty members who interacted with those members and supported program initiatives. Faculty participants were purposefully selected following the student interviews as important influences on the development of AGES. AGES records, including meeting minutes and a growth plan were accessed during the research. Key findings included the effect of short-term leadership on the development of the organizing committee; the important role that faculty members played in the health of a student organization, and the importance of social events when you leave your *career cloak* behind to become a full-time graduate student.

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I would also like to thank the many faculty members and graduate students who have supported AGES. Special thanks go to all AGES committee members. To protect the confidentiality of participants I have not included your names, but this in no way diminishes my appreciation for all you do. In particular, I would like to thank my participants, both graduate students and faculty members. The gift of your stories has enriched this study and I can only hope that my work will live up to the trust you placed in me. Being a part of AGES gave me a sense of *having roots in the Faculty* so to my AGES friends and faculty colleagues, thank you. Knowing you has enriched my life.

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Dedication

For my mother, Sheila Hackett

and,

In memory of my grandmother, Jean McEachran,

you are my inspiration.

Preface

Frame
and reframe
pan until I can see another way of looking and wondering...
You...me... Looking at our circumstances
with fresh eyes
in a celebration of knowing and not knowing
delving into the unknown to catch glimpses of what is there

(Corner, 2004)

"Rules are rules," said the mosquito. "Climb into my boat."

"Your boat is too small for me," said Grasshopper.

"Rules are rules," said the mosquito. "You must get into my boat!"

"I can't fit into your boat," said Grasshopper.

"Rules are still rules!" shouted the mosquito.

"Well then," said Grasshopper, "there is only one thing for me to do." Grasshopper picked up the boat.

"All aboard," called the mosquito.

Grasshopper held the boat very carefully. He stepped into the puddle.

"You are lucky to be with me on this voyage," said the mosquito. "I have been sailing back and forth across this lake for many years," said the mosquito. "I am not afraid of storms or waves."

Grasshopper took another step. "I know more about sailing than anyone else around here," said the mosquito. Grasshopper took one more step. He was on the other side of the puddle. He put the boat down into the water.

"That was good trip," said the mosquito. "Now I must hurry back to the other shore to wait for new riders."

"Thank you," said Grasshopper. "Thank you very much for taking me safely across the lake."

"I was glad to do it," said the mosquito.

Grasshopper waved good-bye and kept on walking down the road.

Arnold Lobel (1986)

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

In a system where graduate students can at best feel engaged and at worse feel isolated and disempowered how might a student association shape and change student experience for the better?

This research study followed the progress of a group of people who together formed AGES in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. The AGES community included the AGES coordinator who led the group, the AGES committee, which is the organizing group, and AGES members who were all graduate students in the Faculty of Education. Although a formal association, there is no formal process for joining AGES and all students in the Faculty of Education are invited to join the planning committee. The AGES committee organized events and activities as well as provides graduate student representation on Faculty committees.

This study focused on a four-year period to explore how AGES evolved during this time and how individual interests shaped the direction of that change. The study has been divided into four case studies. Each case tells the story of the members who formed the AGES community in that academic year (May to April). During the first three years of this study's focus, my own connection to the AGES community evolved from participating in social events to coordinating the AGES committee. In the final year of the study, I resigned as AGES coordinator, but retained my connection as an active member of the AGES committee.

Graduate students spend a limited time on campus so there is a high turnover within the student population. This pattern is reflected in the changing membership of the AGES committee, with the majority of members (68.3%) serving one year or less.

As a graduate student I have reflected on my understanding of community. I have come to recognize that forming and feeling a part of a community are central to my learning and enjoyment of life. Being a co-founder and co-creator of a mother's group for women who had given birth by caesarian was a formative experience in my late 20s. In my professional life I have focused on creating programs that connect new students with each other and resource people on campus. In my student life I connected with other graduate students to create events and activities of mutual interest.

My main connection to a graduate student community came through AGES. While classroom discussion provided many valuable insights during my studies, I wanted more. By immersing myself in the company of other graduate students I hoped to find a student community through which I could gain an understanding of students' needs and interests that would inform both my graduate life and my professional role in student affairs. I also hoped to find a sense of belonging as a graduate student.

I attended a social event organized by AGES a couple of months after I started my first term in graduate school. Through this social connection I began identifying issues facing graduate students whose lives now intersected with mine. When the AGES president was about to graduate, she asked me to be her successor. To support AGES continuation and my own connection to a graduate student community, I moved from being a participant at AGES events to the coordinator. I changed the title from president to coordinator and filled this role for two years.

AGES, according to the association's website,

> was instituted in 1998 by a group of Graduate students who believed in the need for creating a community within the Faculty of Education at UVic. It

> is a registered association with principles and beliefs to promote and support students' participation and involvement in academic activities. (¶ 1)

AGES established the following goals in 2002: (a) to provide support systems for graduate education students in their research endeavors, (b) to foster a sense of community and facilitate networking within the Faculty of Education, and (c) to advocate on behalf of graduate Education students within the Faculty of Education. (Trofimuk, Corner, Maxwell, Marunchak & Devlin, 2002).

Links to Research

This study relates to two main areas of research: degree completion and a changing graduate population. These two areas are reflected in the pressure universities are under to address concerns about degree completion, particularly the lower completion rates for doctoral degrees, (de Valero, 2001; Elgar, 2004; Mullens, 2003) and changes in graduate student demographics (Brazziel, 1993; Institutional Analysis, 1997) that may require new approaches to create supportive learning environments.

Universities Interest in Degree Completion

Research suggests the time to complete a PhD nearly doubled between 1967 and 1995, from approximately 6 to 11 years (Elgar, 2003). Universities and graduate students are responding by conducting their own research on timely completion, supervision, mentoring programs, and collaborative learning. (Applegate, 2002; Conway, 2003; Elgar, 2003; Farr, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Marshall, 2003; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000; Mullens, 2003; Ricks, Kadlec, Corner & Paul, 2003; Sesketh & Knight, 1999; Wilson, 2000)

For this study I have drawn on my experience and knowledge of working with undergraduate students through the University's orientation program. Students who are

able to build a connection during the first few weeks of school are more likely to stay and succeed at university (Beasley 1999; McCannon & Bennett, 1996; Pritchard, 2003; Strauss & Volkwein, 2001). This connection could be with another student, with members of a student club or course union, with other members of a sports team, and/or with a faculty or staff member (Berger & Milem, 1999). These connections *ripple* throughout the student body as individual students discover connections to others and share information and ideas. As I approached this study I wondered how graduate students make connections?

Changes in the Graduate Student Population

Over the past forty years, the typical graduate student has changed. In 1993, Brazziel predicted that we would see an increase in older students entering graduate programs due to changes in demographics. Brazziel noted that "white males in their 20s will be in short supply in 2000, having dropped from 42 to less 30 percent of the total population of these cohorts" (p. 10).

With fewer male students, more female students could potentially fill places in graduate programs if enrolments were to remain steady or increase. As Table 1 illustrates,

Table 1

Changes in Male and Female Graduate Populations at University of Victoria between 1997 and 2004

Year	Female	Male
1997	N=831 (49.08%)	N=862 (50.91%)
2004/2005	N=1364 (58.59%)	N=964 (41.4%)

based on data available through Institutional Analysis at the University of Victoria,

gender was fairly evenly balanced in graduate studies in 1997 (Factbook, Table 6). By 2004/2005, the balance had shifted with a higher proportion of female students enrolled in graduate programs at the University (Enrolment Reports, 2004/2005). A 1997 Institutional Analysis report shows the fastest growing population of graduate students between 1993 and 1997 was full-time female students, aged 46 to 50, with numbers for this age bracket increasing from 62 to 106 (41.5%). While these students represent a relatively small percentage of the overall graduate student population (5.56% of the total graduate population in 1997 and 10.23% of female graduate student population), data suggests that a shift has taken place in the demographics of the student body at this University (Factbook, Table 6). The University Enrolment Report for 2004/2005 indicated in graph 1b that more that 70% of graduate students in the Faculty of Education were female (n=418, 71.33%) (Institutional Analysis 2005).

Brazziel (1993) suggested that changing demographics were going to alter the makeup of the student body at the beginning of the 21st Century. In recent years, the University of Victoria has actively recruited more international students. More students have young families. The importance of providing support for these populations is reflected in increased student services, including new family housing, a Family Centre, and greater international student resources.

Institutional Analysis' Enrolment Reports for 2004/2005 stated that the mean age for graduate students at the University of Victoria was 34, with the youngest student being in the 15 to 19 age bracket and the oldest student being in the 80 to 84 age bracket. The majority of graduate students are aged between 20 and 44 (Table 1c & d). Does this shift in demographics suggest a change in student needs? In some instances, graduate

students may be looking for the same experiences, but in other instances due to age, family circumstances or financial circumstances, they may be looking for different experiences. I wondered how this broad demographic makeup influences graduate student experiences? I also wondered if faculty members may make assumptions about what younger and older graduate students want from their graduate experience?

My Research Interest

Institutional responsibilities to graduate students are enacted in the policies and procedures that guide the Faculty of Graduate Studies, deans, chairs, graduate advisors, supervisors, and graduate secretaries. Policies and procedures also guide graduate students in their rights and responsibilities; however, some graduate students who remain at universities for only a short period of time are less familiar with these policies.

Networks offer possibilities as students can find both support and opportunities through connections with other graduate students and faculty members. AGES became a way for me to explore the perceptions of students who have created and are a part of a supportive network. How do these students speak of their graduate student experiences prior to joining AGES? How do they perceive their membership in AGES influencing their experience of graduate school? Is there a higher completion rate amongst graduate students who participate than those who do not participate? Does engagement influence completion?

One doctoral student in a study conducted on graduate student experiences at the University of Victoria stated, "I think that isolation is devastating to completion" (Ricks et al, 2003). What happens to students who feel powerless in a system they do not

understand? Does isolation devastate completion? I have pondered whether the lack of a supportive network is a problem and whether it reflects a lack of student engagement.

In preparation for this study I began by considering students who are not engaged with their university and how this might affect completion. I also considered a number of related variables that could also be relevant, including student satisfaction, student retention and degree completion (De Valero, 2005; Dumaresq, Lambert-Maberly, Sudmant, Elder & Sivertson, 2004; Elgar, 2003; Ose, 1997; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Strauss, 2001). The challenge facing most institutions regarding retention is to know why students leave. For some it may be financial (Dumaresq, Lambert-Maberly, Sudmant, Elder, & Sivertson, 2004); for others, career and family responsibilities may interfere or there may be a level of dissatisfaction with the status quo as suggested by doctoral students hiring coaches to complete their PhDs (Marshall, 2003). My career in student affairs has, for the past 16 years, put me into regular contact with student staff and volunteers. Some of these students have shared stories of their struggles with academic life and I have wondered if some graduate students might also struggle with the level of responsibility that universities require of them to be successful. Studying at the graduate level requires greater self-motivation and commitment (Dead Thesis Society, 2005).

To understand why AGES matters, it is important to consider the size of the Faculty of Education. In smaller faculties, students might receive more individual attention from faculty and staff members. In larger faculties, students may be more dependent upon each other.

Table 2

Graduate Student Enrolment at the University of Victoria in 2004/2005 for the Two Largest Faculties and Two Smallest Faculties

Faculty	Enrolment
Education	N=586, (24.4%)
Human and Social Development	N=431, (18%)
Fine Arts	N=80, (3.3%)
Law	N=14, (0%)

Table 2 illustrates that the University enrolment report for 2004/2005 stated that the Faculty of Education had the largest graduate student population at the University. The next largest was the Faculty Human and Social Development. These large enrolments contrast with the smallest Faculties of Fine Arts and Law. Many students in Education study by distance or on a part-time basis (N=153, 26.1%). Many students are teachers in K-12 schools, although others work in professions such as nursing and policing. Given these differences, I began to consider those experiences common to graduate students in my Faculty. Do most masters students know how to take a course but not how to complete a project or write a thesis? Do students anticipate their own research and rush to be through the course work? I wrote in my journal,

> I hear frustration in their voices as they [fellow graduate students] describe struggling to complete their theses. I hear some students crying out for a clearly mapped path. How [do I] understand the uniqueness that comes from individual lives intersecting with a system?

This question of intersecting with a system became important to this study. How do AGES committee members perceive themselves as graduate students within the structure of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Graduate Studies?

Defining Curriculum

I entered the curriculum studies program in the Faculty of Education because I wanted to learn how to think in a different way. I was not sure what this would mean as I held a traditional view of curriculum as the content of a course of study. Curriculum was what was taught and the order in which it was to be taught. This more familiar definition is found in the Oxford Dictionary of Current English (2001) which defines curriculum as "the subjects included in a course of study in a school or college" (p. 215).

There were times during my course of study when I wondered if I had found a good fit. My degree included a number of directed studies that were both valuable and meaningful for me as they focused on graduate student experiences. Part of my struggle as a graduate student was coming to understand why I remained in a curriculum studies program when I do not formally teach courses. However, during my studies, another view of curriculum was put forward which focused on the experience of the individual.

> Currere means 'to run.' …With *currere*, we begin with "the personal experience of the individual (the runner) and ask that individual to reflect on what was happening personally as the running (or moving through the curriculum) progressed. (Doll, 2002, p 43)

This research became a means for AGES committee members, including myself, to reflect on what happened to us personally through our connection to AGES. This idea of *currere* mirrored my own experience of working with university students through

student affairs, particularly undergraduates, where they learned by reflecting on problems, issues, and successes and how these had been influenced by their own actions and behaviours. This idea was supported by Christodoulou (2003) when she proposed that it is together that these curricula (outside-of-school, inside-of-school, and non-school curricula) affect "our education and growth" (p. 2). Christodoulou included home, families, and peer relationships among other factors in her definition of curricula. In this study of AGES, it is these "out-of-school" curricula that distinguish AGES as a learning environment. AGES members meet in one another's homes and share stories about their families, their graduate student experiences, and perceptions of university culture. We learn of possibilities in graduate life as members share stories of their successes, such as travelling to present at conferences, receiving funding through grants and scholarships, co-authoring papers, teaching undergraduate courses, and sharing references to scholarly works.

Former graduate students within the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria have researched adult learners (Anderson, 2003; Donaldson, 1998; Faulds, 1997). Early in my studies I found that Conway (2003) was particularly influential. Her study of the effect of group learning on completion piqued my interest as one of my concerns were low completion rates for masters and doctoral students. Conway wrote:

> This high rate of withdrawal is a source of concern not only for graduate students but also for supervisors and administrators in the academic community. Many graduate students have shared stories with me of feeling isolated and unsupported during the research and writing of their theses. (p. 2)

Other students shared their stories with me and the emotional depth of their remarks continued to motivate me in a search for a topic that in some way would relate to a better understanding of graduate student experiences.

As someone who has worked closely with university students for most of my career, I have valued the possibilities that are created when people come together with a purpose. Something new is created when we form a community; something that may be difficult to define. I was intrigued by the idea that, for AGES committee members, belonging to and being active in this organization created an environment of change. Through this study I am striving to understand the *currere* of AGES and how individuals perceived their actions as shaping and changing their own and others' learning.

Purpose of Study

> *ripple* (n) 1. a small wave or series of waves. 2. a rising and falling sound that spreads through a group of people. 3. a feeling or effect that spreads through someone or something (Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of the effects of AGES. Specifically, to understand the possible *ripple effects* this organization had on AGES committee members as well as the perceived effect of AGES on other graduate students and faculty members who presented at and/or attended events. I also hoped to discover if there was movement in the organization's structure and whether these patterns varied over time as the committee members changed. In other words, was there an ebb and flow, like a *tide* that I could observe as the researcher?

In reflecting on AGES, I recognized that the association provided a vehicle for me to explore ways to find greater self-realization in my graduate life and I wondered if it

had a similar effect on others. What are students' perceptions of the effect of AGES? More specifically, the research questions emerged:

1. How does being a part of the AGES committee affect students?
2. How does AGES influence graduate students' interactions with each other?
3. How do interactions with AGES committee members influence faculty?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effects that AGES had on the association's committee and faculty members, therefore this study explored both the perceived *ripple* experienced by individual members as well as the *waves* and *tides* that swelled over the time of the study.

To provide the reader with a context for this multiple case study, I include below a brief history of AGES. There were no formal publications to refer to for this history and yet a history is central to the reader's understanding of this study. As a result, the history is limited to documentation found on the AGES website, in meeting agendas, minutes, information provided by participants' in their interviews, and my own recollections.

A History of AGES

The idea of forming AGES emerged between 1996 and 1998 when one of the founding members approached the then Associate Dean of Education to request support, including financial resources, to establish the association. AGES was formally established in 1998 by this group who wanted to address issues facing graduate students in the Faculty of Education. No documentation was found to identify what these issues were.

It is unclear how many years AGES remained active between 1998 and 2001, the year of the first case study. One of the challenges facing all student groups and associations, particularly graduate student groups, is the rapid turnover of members and the loss of organizational memory (*Dr. Pace*, personal communication, March 17, 2005). What is clear is that, by 2001, AGES was not active, although the memory of the

association remained alive in the Faculty of Education. A graduate student in the Faculty of Education at that time was interested in making connections with other students. She actively sought out reading groups, a support group, and other types of student gatherings, but found nothing organized at that time. Members of the Faculty of Education told her that, in previous years, there had been an organization known as AGES. She contacted the Associate Dean and he was able to provide her with the AGES mission statement and other documentation. Members of the Faculty started referring to her as the president of AGES, a title she adopted.

As the AGES president, this graduate student hosted half-a-dozen social events during that academic year. She invited graduate students and faculty members to meet at the graduate student centre to enjoy conversation and refreshments. She also worked hard to create a sense of place for other graduate students by cleaning and organizing the graduate student lounge, a small room located on the 3rd floor of the MacLaurin Building. The room was furnished with old sofas, a broken fridge that was removed, a chalkboard, and a telephone. The AGES president, assisted by a couple of other graduate students, tidied the room and added posters to the wall to brighten the space.

Another role the AGES president accepted was graduate student representative on the graduate students' association (GSS) grad council. She created an email newsletter to ensure all students in the Faculty were informed about decisions being made on their behalf. She provided regular updates to graduate students in the Faculty of Education with regard to the tuition freeze and medical and dental coverage, as well as other topics of general interest. The AGES president was also contacted by the Dean's secretary and

graduate secretaries when graduate student representatives were needed for Faculty or department committees.

In the early summer of 2002, the AGES president asked me to take over as the leader of AGES. Immediate changes included changing the title from president to coordinator and deciding to form a working committee. These structural changes within AGES resulted in increased programming. AGES also needed full-time students as representatives as their experiences were unknown to me. Based on the undergraduate and graduate students' societies practice of including all students as members, I considered all graduate students in the Faculty of Education to be AGES members. I began a campaign to share this idea with other graduate students. Students who would choose to become involved in organizing and planning events and activities would become AGES committee members. I believed that AGES would only grow as an organization if it offered learning opportunities for graduate students who chose to participate on the committee.

Each committee member was invited to choose how he or she would be involved in the organization. For example, one person decided to take on the role of webmaster and AGES supported this initiative by covering the cost ($25) of an *Introduction to Dreamweaver* course. My own contribution to AGES came from my extensive experience organizing events for students on campus.

The possibilities and the potential of AGES exhilarated all of us as committee members. We began by approaching the Associate Dean of Education, requesting Faculty support for an orientation. Approximately 60 students registered for the event, although only about half this number attended. This rate of attendance is similar to attendance at

other free University events (Student Affairs, 2005). Other activities included Third Thursday, an informal event where faculty members were invited to share their research interests with graduate students. AGES also hosted social events to mark the end of the Fall and Spring terms. One member also compiled a list of upcoming conferences and website addresses for distribution to other graduate students. AGES committee members also sat on Faculty of Education committees such as the Graduate Programs Advisory Committee, Health and Safety Committee, Equity Committee, and hiring committees.

Two major initiatives undertaken in 2002 were an application for funding made to the Dean of the Faculty of Education and an AGES growth plan. In the growth plan, AGES committee members identified the following goals:

1. To provide support systems for graduate education students in their research endeavors.
2. To foster a sense of community and facilitate networking within the Faculty of Education graduate student population.
3. To advocate on behalf of Education graduate students.

By the spring of 2003 two committee members were preparing to leave, having completed their degrees, and another was expecting to leave before the end of the summer. There were a total of six AGES committee members in the 2002/2003 Case Study.

In July of 2003, AGES organized a Faculty of Education orientation for summer students, as well as a reggae barbecue. The event was well attended, with 62 tickets sold to graduate students, faculty members and their families. A new committee member took

the lead on Third Thursday, expanding the event to include presentations by graduate students. While attendance varied from just a few people to up to 18, participants suggested that this event was valuable in creating the sense of an academic culture for attending graduate students within the Faculty of Education. AGES also organized social events to mark the end of the Fall and Spring terms.

In January 2004, the AGES committee created a Faculty of Education calendar of events, available on the AGES website and distributed by email to all graduate students in the Faculty of Education. The calendar promoted both AGES and Faculty of Education organized activities, including a new program, the International and Canadian Student Coffeehouse. AGES committee members continued to sit on Faculty of Education committees, such as Graduate Programs Advisory Committee and Health and Safety.

A past AGES committee member provided a new link to the Faculty of Education's Research Culture Committee. The AGES committee suggested topics and made a request that the next research forum be held on a Saturday, so those students who worked full-time could attend. Participation jumped from under 20 at the previous weekday forum held in the Fall term to over 60 graduate student participants, suggesting an interest amongst graduate students in weekend events.

In May 2004 I stepped down as coordinator. AGES grew in a new direction as the new coordinator brought forward different interests, including a greater focus on the opportunities available to students to participate on Faculty committees. The new coordinator was invited by faculty members to participate in a number of program orientations, introducing new students to AGES. This coordinator decided to highlight opportunities that existed for students to become graduate representatives on Faculty

committees. In response to this approach, the AGES committee grew from five to eight members that fall term (with turnover, four students were new to the committee). Two international students also joined the AGES committee at the end of the Spring term, bringing the total committee membership to ten for the 2004/2005 Case Study. Having broad representation on Faculty committees was the major focus for AGES that year. Social events included a summer pizza party and an end of term holiday party held November 24, 2004. The coordinator focused additional promotion in the School of Physical Education and the summer pizza party attracted, for the first time, a large number of students from that unit. Feedback from PE students was very positive.

Third Thursdays ended and were replaced by workshops and symposiums. One committee member was interested in graduate students' transition from degree to career and organized a workshop on career transition with the University's Career Services office. Another student was interested in publishing as a graduate student and organized a daylong symposium on this topic. The AGES website was redesigned and updated and the bulletin board maintained. Another committee member formed a doctoral student network, which met weekly. This group suggested that AGES purchase a transcriber to assist with graduate student research initiatives. This same committee member later secured the generous donation of a transcriber from Dr. Vern Storey and the transcriber is now available to all graduate students in the Faculty of Education for their research.

In January 2005, AGES introduced a monthly coffeehouse for international and Canadian students, meeting in the faculty, staff and graduate student lounge. The new AGES coordinator was an active member of the Faculty of Education's Learning Commons Committee, successfully lobbied for graduate student space in Education. A

new AGES space was created in a small room on the second floor of the Curriculum Lab in the MacLaurin Building. Recently the Faculty added a number of computers to this space.

A new coordinator began in the spring of 2005 and the AGES committee again experienced an increase, growing to 18 people, including the two international students who joined earlier in the year. The International and Canadian Students Coffeehouse continued and there was another graduate student forum, this one focusing on the theme of demystifying graduate school. At the time of writing, planning is underway for a new workshop on web design and weekly brown bag lunches that will allow graduate students to share their research interests. AGES committee members continue to sit on Faculty of Education committees and the coordinator now also sits on both the Faculty's Research Culture Committee and the Education Alumni Association.

The Faculty of Education and the graduate students' society have both supported AGES, but I believe that it is through the commitment of the AGES committee members themselves that the greatest difference has been made. The AGES committee reflected Doll's (2002) view that "Community, with its emphasis on both care and critique – an emphasis that requires a high degree of trust – is what elevates us above ourselves" (p. 50).

This next section is the formal review of literature. Related literature was divided into four main sections: (a) curriculum; (b) student engagement; (c) degree completion; and (d) graduate student experiences.

Curriculum informs the paradigm for this research study and becomes a channel through which I have studied this graduate student experience. For me, understanding

curriculum as *curerre* was pivotal in my selection of a research topic. I have therefore begun my literature review with a selective review of curriculum.

Selective Review of Curriculum

As someone working outside of the teaching profession, I did not enter this research degree with an established understanding of the meaning of the word *curriculum*. Three themes emerged from reviewing curriculum literature in relations to this study. These themes were: (a) that curriculum changes over time, (b) that the participants determine curriculum, and (c) that curriculum is more than what is planned for students, it is also what is done by students.

Curriculum Changes Over Time

Moore (2003) commented on the system of curriculum that is "interrelating and dynamically changing structures, with structures of the disciplines existing as but minor parts of this larger whole" (p.43). I watched the structure of AGES change significantly, once when I became the coordinator and a second time when another coordinator's vision changed the structure again. In exploring AGES, I became interested in what happens when individuals and administrative structures intersect. This intersection of individual and structure can result in misunderstandings as well as exciting and unexpected outcomes. Complex situations can arise that are influenced by individual's visions, assumptions and previous experiences. How we choose to frame the curriculum will limits what we can see and experience (Gough, 2002).

The Participants Determine Curriculum

This study adopts the concept of *currere* (Doll, 2003) to ask the individual *runners* or AGES committee members to reflect on what was happening personally as

they progressed through graduate studies as an AGES member. In researching curriculum I was drawn to the idea that curriculum was something experienced by the individual rather than a course set for the individual by others (Doll, 2003). Being mindful of my own active participation in AGES, the research and topic are for me profoundly linked to the idea of *currere*, a concept of curriculum that I have been introduced to through my pursuit of this degree.

Curriculum is More Than What is Planned for Students, It is Also What Students Do

Fleener (2002), inspired by Goodwin (1994), describes "an organocentric curriculum (that) focuses not on the traditional 'pieces' of the curriculum, the content, the subjects, the lessons, the structure but on the complex formed by the student/inquiry and the school/society interaction" (p. 159). This concept of interaction reflected my learning experience in AGES and Evans and Miller's (1997) discussion of graduate students as adult learners. Moller, Prestera, Harvey, Downs-Keller and McCausland (2002) note that "One of the key principles of organic environments is that the learner should neither be isolated from nor become subsumed by the larger group" (p. 54). Are AGES members isolated from or subsumed by the larger group? Does AGES create a *ripple* that undulates out into the wider Faculty community?

Aoki (1996) used the metaphor of a bridge in an Oriental garden as a place where one could pause and think. It was "– a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence" (p.6). By moving my own thinking onto a bridge that urged me to linger I could consider both *this* and *that* of the AGES experience. Curriculum studies became the course I followed. I embraced the experience of running with ideas drawn from curriculum studies

and then stopping to linger to construct multiple meanings for the relationship of graduate students with their engagement in graduate studies through AGES.

A review of the literature on graduate students was focused on three areas: (a) student engagement, which included graduate student organizations (Miller & Dirkx, 1995) and self-esteem (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary & Baldwin, 1999); (b) degree completion, which included completion rates (de Valero, 2005; Elgar, 2003; Johnson & Conyers, 2001; Mullens, 2003; Wilson, 2000) and future faculty (Adams, 2002; Applegate, 2002; Gaff & Pruitt-Logan, 1998), and (c) graduate student experiences, which included supervisory relationship (Farr, 2002; Holdaway & Winchester, 1995; Marsh, Rowe & Martin, 2002; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000), research culture (Deem & Brehony, 2000; Johnson 1995) and student isolation (Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Humphrey & McCarthy, 1999).

Student Engagement

For the purpose of this literature review I considered student engagement in terms of the connection to school formed through relationships with others. Students belonging to or being a member of a student association, a club, or a group were recognized as having a *connection*. If and how students chose to become involved could be influenced by "their perceptions of campus culture" (Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, Lee & Barnett, 2003, p. 14). Much of the literature regarding student engagement has focused on undergraduate students. As noted in Chapter 1, undergraduate students who are able to build a connection during the first few weeks of school are more likely to stay and succeed at university (Beasley 1999; McCannon & Bennett, 1996; Pritchard, 2003; Strauss & Volkwein, 2001). From this literature I wondered if graduate students perceive

value in forming connections? Will the idea that it is valuable to build connections be reflected in the data from this study?

Three themes have emerged from a review of the literature with regard to student engagement: (a) how does student involvement benefit the individual student (Ose, 1997; Smith & Griffin, 1993; McCannon & Bennett, 1996; Hoyle et al, 1999); (b) how does student involvement benefit the educational institution (Miller & Dirkx, 1995; Adams, 2002; Applegate, 2002); and (c) how does student involvement benefit society (Eklund-Leen, 1997; Galbraith, 1995).

How Does Student Involvement Benefit the Individual Student

Smith and Griffin (1993) observed that undergraduate student involvement in extracurricular activities had a positive effect on "students' development of educational goals and career and lifestyle plans." (p.83). Would this be equally true for graduate students? "The reason most frequently given for pursing a graduate degree (at the University of Victoria) was related to employment/career advancement (n=205 respondents or 34% of sample)" (Ricks et al, 2003, p. 12). Given the high level of interest in employment and career advancement in that study, it is worth reflecting on the possible career benefits graduate students might experience by being active members of the AGES committee.

Much of the research on student involvement in student associations or organizations was conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, although student associations and student activism have recently returned as areas of interest (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997; Ropers-Huilman et al, 2003). In terms of student participation in student associations, McCannon and Bennett (1996) noted that students chose to become involved in a student

organization because they "wanted membership to list on resume" or "want to meet people with similar interest" (p. 3). While there are benefits associated with involvement, many students choose not to become involved. The majority of the total participants in McCannon and Bennett's study (83%) did not belong to a student organization related to their major. Over half of the respondents selected "having job responsibilities no time for a student organization [or] not aware of student organization related to major" (p. 3) as their reason for not participating. This finding supports my own experience of talking to graduate students who chose not to become involved with AGES, although with graduate students, family commitments was an additional reason given.

The role of graduate student organizations was the focus of a study by Millar and Dirx (1995). Their study suggested that student organizations might have an effect on graduate student culture through mentoring. While recognizing the important role of the student's supervisor in guiding the research, being active in a student association might support or enhance students' experiences of graduate school.

Involved students could also experience *contingent self-esteem* or "positive feelings of self-worth that are dependent upon achieving specific outcomes, meeting expectations, matching standards." (Hoyle et al, 1999, p. 93).

How Does Student Involvement Benefit the Educational Institution

Students who are engaged and are positive about their university experience could benefit educational institutions. These students may become unofficial ambassadors for the institution, as well as future Alumni supporters. Ose (1997) in a qualitative study observed in relation to transfer students that involved students had a more positive college experience while uninvolved student had a more difficult transition. It is

interesting to note that both the involved and uninvolved students wished they had been more engaged during their studies, suggesting both groups perceived value in involvement obtained though extracurricular activities.

How Does Student Involvement Benefit Society

Being involved with others suggests the formation of community. Collins Canadian Dictionary (2004) defines community as "people living in one locality [and] a group of people having cultural, religious, or other characteristics in common." (p. 231). While there are cultural differences between universities and colleges, particularly colleges and the culture of graduate studies in a research university, many of the outcomes found in Eklund-Leen's (1997) study of college students would be valued in the culture of universities as well. Involved students had a positive attitude about community involvement.

The University of Victoria identified community as one of four key areas in its strategic plan, stating the following:

> We are a product of our community and play an important role in the social, cultural and economic life of the region and the province. We recognize the importance of collaboration with other institutions in this region and across the province. We also recognize the importance of meeting the educational needs of a rapidly changing population in this region. Our goal is to establish UVic as a recognized cornerstone of the community, committed to the social, cultural and economic development of our region and nation. (¶ 1)

This statement suggests the importance the University places on members of the campus community, including graduate students, forming positive relationships with individuals and groups in our wider community.

Returning to the themes of how student involvement benefits the individual student (Ose, 1997; Smith & Griffin, 1993; McCannon & Bennett 1996; Hoyle et al, 1999); how student involvement benefits the educational institution (Miller & Dirkx, 1995); and how student involvement benefits society (Eklund-Leen & Young, 1997; Galbraith, 1995) leads to consideration of community-based education. Galbraith (1995) citing Compton and McClusky (1980) writes "community-based education generates and utilizes available resources and skills, as well as those untapped skills and resources, to meet the varied needs of the community and those of its residents." (p. 7). Could a graduate student association, such as AGES represent a form of community-based education? The AGES committee utilized the resources and skills of its members. It also has tapped into member's interests and provided a supportive learning environment so those students met both their own needs and the needs of the wider AGES community.

Degree Completion

De Valero (2001), in a study that used both quantitative analysis and qualitative methods, stated that factors affecting degree completion included "attitudes towards students, student participation in departmental academic and social activities, and peer support" (p 344). As noted earlier, research shows the time to complete a PhD has increased. The range of this increase varies in studies from two years, going from 6 to 8 years (de Valero, 2001) to nearly doubling between 1967 and 1995, from 6 to 11 years (Elgar, 2003). At the same time, data from a survey of one cohort of masters and doctoral

students conducted by University Affairs in 2003 suggests the completion rate for doctoral students is still around the 6 year range in many Canadian universities (Berkowitz, 2003). In addition to increased time to complete degrees, completion rates remained low with over a third of masters students and over a half of doctoral students failing to complete their degrees (Berkowitz, 2003; Cude, 2001). Will belonging to a student association, such as AGES, have an effect on completion rates or are students who are more likely to complete more likely to join a student association?

Students must remain at university to complete their degrees, however there is only one reference to "retention" on the University of Victoria's Institutional Analysis website. It is in a report on Applicant, Admission, and Arrival Patterns at UVic, Fall 2002 which states that, "this higher admission cut-off was due to a continued high demand for admission to UVic as well as a high level of retention for upper year students" (p.2). A search for "students leaving" produced a 1998 UVic Undergraduate Student Survey that included a reference to "students planning to transfer or discontinue their studies" (p.3).

So not all students leave because they are dissatisfied with some aspect of the institution. As suggested by the Institutional Analysis report (1998), some undergraduate students may plan to transfer to another institution to complete a degree not offered by the University. They complete two years of pre-requisite courses at their local university and then transfer. For students who can commute, attending the local university can be less expensive when the student continues to live with family members. While graduate students are unlikely to move to another institution, similar cost-saving factors could motivate a student to return home to complete their thesis or dissertation. This could mean a student would move to another city, another province, or another country before

her or his degree is completed. Removing themselves from the university environment could contribute to feelings of isolation and might, in some instances, result in a student withdrawing from her or his degree program.

Another report by Dumaresq et al, (2004) stated that, in response to rising tuition, 16.6% of the overall group would select *leaving/quitting their studies* as a strategy to deal with the increased cost of tuition, as compared to 33.4% who would select *earning more money.* In addition, they found that some students might leave because of changes in their family or financial circumstance.

Timely completion was part of the focus of the Ricks et al (2003) study. It was noted in the study that participants identified 629 barriers to timely completion, "categorized into five recurring themes." These themes included "Lack of Guidance (307 respondents, 49%); Funding (154 respondents, 24%); Family & Career Responsibilities (85 respondents, 14%); Health Problems (46 respondents, 7%); and Availability of Supervisor (37 respondents, 6%)." (p.32). Lack of guidance in particular is considered important in terms of the purpose of the current study.

Graduate Student Experiences

Graduate student experiences are intertwined with the larger university community. Significant increases in graduate student populations are placing pressures on universities who must juggle funding, space and staffing requirements to meet not only the needs of graduate studies, but also the needs of the wider university community. An increase in the number of part-time faculty also affects both undergraduate and graduate student interactions with faculty (Kuh 2004; Kuh, 2003). The Government of

Canada Post-Secondary Graduate Report (1999) recorded a 35% increase in masters degrees awarded

Table 3

Increase in Graduate Degrees Awarded 1987 to 1996

Degree	1987	1996	Increase
Masters	14,012	21,558	35.0%
Doctoral	2424	4000	65%

between 1987 and 1996 (see Table 3), noting that this increase "is largely in part to the growth of the number of female graduates receiving Master's degrees" (¶1). There is a trend in Canadian universities to continue to increase enrolment in graduate programs to meet the projected shortfall of both faculty and professionals as Baby Boomers age and retire (Brazziel, 1993). The University of Victoria has recorded a small increase of just under 3% between 2003/2004 and 2005/2006 (University of Victoria, 2005a; Institutional Analysis, Enrolment Report 2004/2005).

Given the lower completion rate of doctoral students (de Valero, 2001; Elgar, 2003) and the anticipated increased need for PhD graduates, it is perhaps no surprise that doctoral students are an area of major focus for research in higher education. Indeed, the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools created the Preparing Future Faculty program "in 1993 to develop new models of doctoral preparation for a faculty career" (Applegate, 2002, p. v).

Questions about graduate students' sense of isolation or belonging were a constant *ripple* through the literature review. (Elgar, 2003; Marshall, 2003; Ricks et al, 2003). In 1995 Johnston wrote about "strategies designed to overcome problems of

isolation of postgraduate research students (to) build a sense of belonging in the academic community." This sense of isolation or belonging may differ by Faculty as a masters student receiving funding from her or his supervisor and working in a lab will probably have a very different experience from a part-time masters student, not receiving funding, with no place to hang their coat and hat (Deem & Brehony, 2000; Ricks et al, 2003). For this reason, questions of isolation, belonging, and completion are *ripples* that can perhaps best be studied at the individual faculty, school, or departmental level (Ricks et al, 2003).

In this chapter I have provided a history of AGES and outlined the four main areas of my literature review: curriculum; student engagement; degree completion, and graduate student experiences. The purpose was to frame this study within a curriculum context so that student engagement, degree completion, and graduate student experiences could be considered and used to inform myself as the researcher, as well as future readers of this study. While the focus of this study is graduate students in the Faculty of Education, I have taken a broader perspective in my review of literature. In my review I included a focus on the supervisory relationship (Farr, 2002; Holdaway & Winchester, 1995; Marsh, Rowe & Martin, 2002; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000), as AGES might be a way to address some concerns about lack of guidance identified by UVic graduate students (Ricks et al, 2003). One aspect of the supervisory relationship that was of interest was the mentoring role of the supervisor (Farr, 2002; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000) and Miller and Dirkx (1995) suggested this might be a role that could be partially fulfilled by a student association.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

When I travel I select a range of travel books and websites to study different aspects of the destination. Some reference materials may have better cultural listings, while others provide better maps or restaurant listings. It is always interesting to see which important sites appear in all the reference materials. I have taken the same approach to my study of methodology, focusing first on qualitative research and then on case study. Alvesson (2003), Creswell (2005, 2003, 1998), Gall, Borg & Gall, (1996), Guba and Lincoln (1989), Maxwell (1996), Patton (1990), Stake (1995), and Yin (2003) have been the reference materials for my journey.

My supervisory committee guided the development of the methodology for this multiple case study. There is an uncertainty, which is both exciting and disquieting, in qualitative research. Research questions are revised as new information emerges. What will be discovered or understood from any research is not known at the outset. Stake (1995) said that, "in a qualitative research project, issues emerge, grow, and die. In quantitative research, as an issue becomes more refined or important, a parallel study is started; the present one keeps its issues intact" (p. 21). In qualitative research, biases are identified, as are the limitations of the research. The researcher is not seeking to demonstrate causality, but to develop an in-depth understanding of something specific.

Stake (1995) defines case studies as an in-depth exploration of an object rather than a process. As an example, Stake states that a child or a teacher can be a case, but the teaching cannot be a case because it "lacks the specificity, the boundedness, to be called a case…The case is a specific, a complex functioning thing" (p. 2). The AGES committee,

understood through interviews with individual members, is the specific, complex, functioning thing of this multiple case study.

In this research I have taken a constructivist approach, "a theory which views knowledge as constructed not merely discovered" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2000, p. 55-56). I am constructing an understanding of AGES and its perceived effect on committee members, other graduate students, and the Faculty of Education. Did I observe a *tide* or an *ebb and flow* of influence as AGES grew over the time of this multiple case study? For the reader to better understand the context of this case study, I included a brief history of AGES in my review of literature.

Yin (2003) recommended interviews as an information source for case studies. Interviews with AGES committee members and faculty members were the primary source of information for this study. While preset questions guided the interviews (see Appendix D), a fluid approach was taken that invited participant's impressions and reflections. Participants were invited to share both their impressions and recollections of specific events or experiences.

This research focused on graduate students who belonged to the AGES committee between 2001 and 2005, each case starting in May and ending in April. Through this study I am seeking to understand the multiple perspectives of AGES committee members and others in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria.

I generated meaning through the analysis of data collected through open-ended questions – meaning participants may have already formed and meaning that emerged through the interview process. Participants were interviewed once, with a follow-up group interview with two participants from Case Study 2. Two of the participants from

this case study stated that they could not recall details, so a meeting was organized to see if shared stories would trigger memories. Although this session was taped, no additional information was gleaned from this session. As the AGES coordinator I was a researcher-participant in Case Studies 2 and 3.

Each case study was constructed by focusing on AGES members' perceptions of the organization and their experiences in AGES. The thesis is my construction and interpretation of AGES created from participant interviews, AGES records, including meeting minutes, website, and an AGES growth plan. Student participants completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) for the purpose of describing the sample. The study also included data from faculty interviews and a faculty demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F). Faculty members were also asked about their memories of graduate school and their perceptions of how their own experiences were similar or dissimilar to current graduate students' experiences in their own departments.

Context

AGES is a graduate student association in a Faculty of Education that is situated in a comprehensive university in the province of British Columbia. The University is found on the furthest West Coast of Canada, separated from the mainland by the Strait of Georgia. Student enrollment in 2005-2006 reached "18,906 (including 2,423 graduate students)" (University of Victoria, 2005a ¶1).

The University has 10 faculties (Business, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Graduate Studies, Human and Social Development, Humanities, Law, Science and Social Science) and 2 divisions (Continuing Studies and Medical Sciences). All graduate students are enrolled in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. All faculty members are hired

through their academic department, reporting through their Chair to the Dean of their Faculty or Division.

Graduate student representatives from each department sit on a grad council, equivalent to a board of directors. Graduate students are represented by the Graduate Students' Society (GSS) and elected representatives on the University's Board of Directors and Senate, as well as various ad hoc University committees.

The GSS provides funding for department representatives (graduate students) to organize events and activities at the departmental level. At the time of Case Study 2 this amounted to $400 per year per department (Association of Graduate Education Students, 2002b). The organization of events at the departmental level are dependant upon two main factors: an interested student or a group of students willing to donate their time and faculty and staff members willing to provide continuing support. Support could take the form of information sharing, welcoming graduate student representation on committees, the provision of space, additional funding, the donation of faculty and staff time, and access to University facilities such as rooms, computers, listservs, campus mail, and so on.

Levels of extra-curricular activity vary greatly across departments within the University, as well as within the same department over time. When there is an active student or student group, there will be a greater number of extra-curricular activities organized by students and stronger graduate student representation. When no student is interested or willing to volunteer their time, there are fewer extra-curricular activities, many of those taking place being organized by faculty and staff.

Three departmental units comprise graduate studies in the Faculty of Education at the University: the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (EDCI); the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies (EPLS); and the School of Physical Education (PE). For a number or years, through AGES, graduate students in EDCI and EPLS have pooled departmental funding received from the GSS to create larger events for all students in the Faculty of Education (see Appendix B, Tables 5 to 8 for a complete list of activities and committees by case study). PE is housed in a different building from the other two Education units. Students in PE have access to a resource room where students congregate and participate in extra-curricular activities that are separate from those organized by the Faculty. Invitations were extended each year to PE students to join the AGES Committee. At the time of writing, AGES has a PE committee member, but she joined after the completion of the case studies.

Each academic year, committee members have graduated and new students have joined the committee. As the membership changed, so too has the dynamic and focus of AGES activities. Different activities reflected the influence of the coordinator and the interests of the members of each AGES committee. I have selected collective case study as the method that could best reflect individual cases and the shared experiences of all AGES committees.

In seeking to describe perceptions of the effect of AGES on the Faculty of Education, I am mindful of a number of limitations and biases. I believe that AGES has made a difference and hope through this study to describe that difference. I have a commitment that developed through a long affiliation with the organization and relationships established with participants and faculty members that I interviewed for this

study. My professional interest in creating healthy and positive graduate student experiences motivated aspects of both my membership in AGES and the development of this study. As a member of the AGES committee and a past AGES coordinator, I brought my own memories to this study and may be more inclined to see effects where none occurred. As a University staff member, I have a different relationship with faculty members than other AGES members and may be more sympathetic to their perspectives than other AGES committee members whose relationship is defined primarily through their graduate student experiences. The majority of AGES committee members were white Canadian women and this may have limited the themes and meanings that emerged from the data. As a collective case study, this research was limited to particular communities at specific point in time, so data cannot be generalized to the wider population without caution. In all of these limitations and biases I have turned to my supervisor and committee members for guidance on how to best address each issue.

Materials

The protocol and framework for this study was developed as a research proposal presented to my supervisory committee and supported by an application to the University's Human Research Ethics Board, which was approved in November 2004. Research materials included questionnaires for both graduate students and faculty members. Interview questions were reworded on the advice of my supervisory committee to eliminate the perception of a favorable effect from AGES. These questions provided a structure for the interviews, although additional questions were asked for the purpose of clarification or expansion of ideas during the interviews. Following the first interview,

questions were re-ordered for greater clarity. A copy of consent form and a list of interview questions are included in Appendices C and D.

Preparation included prior training and experience in setting up personal in-depth interviews and focus groups for "Research on Critical Aspects of Graduate Education at the University of Victoria: Graduate Student Experiences, Timely Completion, Supervision" under the direction of the principle investigator (Ricks et al, 2003). Additional training in conducting focus groups was obtained from the Department of Human Resources at the University who conducted a course for a Professional Employees Association focus group study on professional development (2003).

Participants

Graduate students who were involved with AGES between 2001 and 2005 were recruited by invitation to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who were believed to be important informants. Creswell (2003) stated that "the idea behind qualitative research is to *purposefully* select participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) that will best help the researcher to understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). Participants must first have agreed to participate and were told they could withdraw without explanation or penalty at any time. No student participant refused and none withdrew from the study. Purposeful sampling was also used to select faculty members within the Faculty of Education and they too must first have agreed to participate and were told they could withdraw without explanation or penalty at any time. No faculty participants refused and none withdrew from the study. Faculty participants were identified from the student participants'

interviews. All participants demonstrated agreement by reading and signing a consent form (see Appendix C).

All participants were given copies of their transcript and asked to confirm their data could be included in the research. They were told that they had the right to have data removed and not included in the analysis. Two participants asked for small sections of their interviews to be excluded and these sections of their transcripts were deleted.

Interviews were recorded on a hand-held cassette recorder and all audiotapes from individual interviews were destroyed upon completion of this study. Transcripts were made of individual interviews using code names. During the time of the study all data was stored securely in the researcher's home office. Transcripts of interviews were retained until the defense for the thesis was completed and then they were shredded.

AGES is a public body and while this research is focused on the multiple perspectives that will emerge through the research process, rather than identifying individuals, anonymity cannot be fully protected. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, code names were used. Names rather than numbers were chosen to reflect the importance of human relationships in this study. Participants were invited to choose a name if they wished. In instances where they did not wish to choose a name, I selected a name that had meaning for me in relation to that individual, often based on the content of her or his interview. Interviews were taped and field notes were taken during the interviews and meetings. Individual and group interviews were between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

Ten graduate students were interviewed for this study. Three were doctoral students and seven were masters students. Three were between the ages of 20 and 30 and

seven were between the ages of 30 and 40. I included a question about students' ages in the student demographic questionnaire as at the time the survey was developed I wondered if older participants' careers might be a factor that influenced students' perceptions of, as well as their area of interest in, the AGES committee. Faculty members' ages were not considered significant as all participants were established in their careers and were in tenure track positions. The student demographic questionnaire also asked about a participant's past volunteer experience and the estimated time for completion of student's degree. Two of the participants were international students.

Table 4

Student Participant Demographics

Case	Degree	Age	Volunteer	Estimated
1	PhD	30-40	Yes	3 years
2	Masters	30-40	Yes	Less than 2
2	Masters	30-40	Yes	2 years
2	Masters	30-40	No	5 years
3	Masters	20-30	Yes	Less than 2
3	PhD	20-30	Yes	4 years
3	Masters	30-40	Yes	Less than 2
4	Masters	30-40	No	3 years
4	Masters	20-30	Yes	2 years
4	PhD	30-40	Yes	3-4 years

Copies of the demographic questionnaires are included in Appendices E and F and interview questions are included in Appendix D. Table 4 provides a breakdown of student participant demographics by case study.

To protect faculty participant's confidentiality, I have not included their department in the demographic table. Faculty participants were purposefully selected from student interviews. That is, faculty members who were perceived to be of important to AGES by participants or whose names were mentioned in more than one interview were selected. Four faculty members were interviewed for this study.

Table 5

Faculty Participant Demographics

Case Study	Degree	Decade Degree Awarded	AGES Associations
1	EdD	1980s	Presented at AGES event Asked for AGES input on committee Other
2	PhD	1980s	Presented at AGES event Other
3	PhD	1970s	Presented at AGES event Other
4	PhD	1970s	Presented at AGES event

Table 5 provides a breakdown of faculty participant demographics by case study. They were members of the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, the two departments in which graduate student participants were enrolled. No faculty participants were selected from the School of Physical Education. Faculty participants were asked when they had completed their degree, their program area, gender, and past associations with AGES, including being a presenter, an advisor, and a service provider.

Procedures

Graduate student interviews were conducted between December 2004 and February 2005. As there was no formal AGES committee in 2001, only one student was interviewed for the 2001/2002 case study. Three students were interviewed for each of the subsequent case studies. One group interview was held in January 2005 for the 2002/2003 case study. Graduate student interviews were conducted in the researcher's home office, work office, a graduate student office, a classroom and by telephone. Four student participants were interviewed by telephone.

Faculty members were interviewed in March 2005. Faculty interviews were conducted in the faculty members' offices and were shorter in duration, usually no more than 30 minutes. Student and faculty interviews were conducted during the morning, afternoon, and early evening at the convenience of participants. The researcher was the only data gatherer for this study.

Student interviews were fully transcribed in January and February 2005. All interviews were listened to for a second time without transcription to more clearly hear the participants' voices. Faculty interviews were fully transcribed in April and May, 2005. All participants were asked to review the transcript from their interview and all approved their transcripts.

Following an initial analysis of the data, the interviews were read through again to identify major themes and sub-themes. These themes are discussed further in the results section as preliminary findings. AGES documentation was also accessed for this study, including meeting minutes, a budget proposal, agendas, a growth plan, posters and emails.

A more detailed description of the analysis process is included in the results section as the procedures evolved with the data analysis, however the following provides an outline of the process, guided by Creswell (2005):

1. The first step began by collecting the data. This involved gathering meeting minutes, agendas, budget proposals, a growth plan, posters and emails. Data collection also involved conducting interviews with student participants. This involved selecting the participants using purposeful sampling, contacting the participants and then,

having obtained their consent, arranging an interview time. The first step concluded once the interviews had been conducted.

2. The second step involved preparing the data for analysis, including reviewing and sorting documentation. Student interviews were first listened to and then transcribed. Participants were then sent a copy of their transcript for approval.
3. The third step was to listen to all of the participant interviews for a second time and to select faculty participants based on the student interviews.
4. The fourth step was to contact faculty participants requesting an interview. Once consent was obtained an interview time was arranged. The forth step concluded once the interviews had been conducted.
5. The fifth step was to transcribe the faculty interviews. Participants were then sent a copy of their transcript for approval.
6. The sixth step was to code the interview data for preliminary analysis. This included selecting text for descriptions and identifying themes.
7. The seventh step was to report the case studies in chronological order. Interviews were then coded by topic. Major and unique topics were identified by case study.
8. The eighth set was to complete the data analysis and to write the thesis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction to Analysis

Preliminary data analysis was completed in April of 2005 and included a presentation given at Connections 2005, a Faculty of Education conference held at the University of Victoria. Preliminary analysis (Corner & Lauzon, 2005) identified five themes: isolation, belonging, benefits, culture and recognition. *Isolation* came from not knowing people; *belonging* was reflected in wanting to feel connected; *benefits* were the motivation for participants to join AGES; *culture* referred to the environment as experienced by participants; and *recognition* included recognition by others as well as self-recognition.

Work commitments made it difficult to pursue further analysis over the summer months and when I returned to writing in late October 2005, I began by re-writing the introduction and expanding the literature review. For much of December and into early January 2006, I focused on methodology, only returning to analysis in the middle of January 2006.

In the intervening months between the preliminary analysis and the final analysis, I read, reviewed, and selected an analysis process for this research. Creswell (2003) provided steps for data analysis and interpretation and Creswell (2005) provided guidance regarding the coding process. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) were referred to for better understanding of the complexities of conducting a case study or multiple case study. Indeed, after reading many chapters on case study and data analysis, I found myself cautioned regarding both the complexities of this task, as well as the frequency with which researchers abandon further analysis out of sheer exhaustion. Throughout this

process I have felt privileged by the trust placed in me by my colleagues and have endeavored to remain on task, committed to a rigorous analysis that reflected both my appreciation of and my admiration for this remarkable group of people. I have remained mindful of Yin (2003) and his comment that:

> Perhaps the greatest concern has been over the lack of rigor of case study research. Too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings or conclusions. (p. 10)

As a researcher, I strove to remain alive to the possible bias this commitment to participants may have brought to the analysis and discussion and was mindful of the necessity not to shirk from acknowledging less favourable observations. I began the final analysis by re-reading the interview from the first case study. There was only one graduate student participant for this case, making the initial identification of topics easier than it would have been should I have started with any of the subsequent case studies, each of which had three graduate student participants. Supporting the construction of Case Study 1 was the analysis of the faculty participant's interview for this time frame. Additionally, by beginning with the first case, I was able to proceed in chronological order, as recommended by Yin (2003). I hoped this process would help me to identify major themes or *waves*, as well as changes in the structure or *tidal* patterns that might *ebb and flow* over the time of the four studies. Yin (2003) outlines five techniques for case study analysis. I selected time-series analysis and have presented the case studies in

chronological order, identifying distinctive *ripples* as well as overlapping themes that became *waves* over the course of the study.

> You should not think of the arraying of events into a chronology as a descriptive device only. The procedure can have an important analytic purpose – to investigate presumed causal events – because the basic sequence of a cause and its effect cannot be temporally inverted. Moreover, the chronology is likely to cover many different types of variables and not be limited to a single independent or dependent variable. (p. 125-126).

Part of the challenge of undertaking multiple case studies of an association are the range of variables to be studied. Yin's (2003) comment suggests that a chronological framework may assist by providing both a structure and an opportunity to observe something that would otherwise remain hidden.

Each case study will have its own chronology; however, each is also influenced by the chronology of the academic year at the University. While there are three admission points in the academic year, the institution as a whole launches the academic year in September (the financial year begins in April). This is when the largest number of graduate students enter the University and it is often the focus of activities such as orientation and other welcoming events. September is a recruitment point for AGES and also when new graduate representatives for the GSS volunteer or are appointed. Graduate student representatives can apply for the first installment of departmental funding from GSS with supporting signatures from other graduate students in their department and their graduate advisor. The Fall term (September to December) is often a time for

planning programs for the Winter term (September to April). The end of the Fall term has for a number of years been marked by a Winter social event organized by the AGES committee. For a number of years there have been academic related Spring events organized by the Faculty's Research Culture Committee and more recently AGES working in partnership with this committee. These events are followed by the Faculty of Education's Connections conference. The end of the Spring term in April has, for the past number of years, been the turnover point for the coordinating position and committee members. This is partially due to a larger number of students graduating in May and partially due to this being the end of the Winter term and a time when students make changes in their lives. Summer activities have included program orientations organized by departments and AGES, as well as a social event organized by the students who form the AGES committee. The Faculty's Research Culture Committee holds forums once a term (Fall, Spring and Summer).

AGES committee members sat on a number of Faculty committees, representing graduate students in Education. Committee appointments were also made at the start of the Fall term. All graduate students in the Faculty of Education are welcome to join the AGES committee at any time in the school year, and this has been born out by past practice.

The Faculty of Education also has a significant number of graduate students who arrive on campus for Summer Session. These students often study in cohort groups and have limited interaction with students registered in regular on-campus programs. A few students will also enter at the start of the Spring term in January.

Analysis

Final analysis of the data began in the middle of January 2006 when I was able to take time off work to focus on this research. I began by working on Case Study 1 by re-reading and then sorting Beatrix' interview into categories. I then re-read and sorted Dr. Pace's interview, the faculty member selected to complement Beatrix's story. His interview also provided additional information for the case study. As a faculty member, Dr. Pace had a different perspective from Beatrix and he was able to identify a number of obstacles that would potentially affect AGES; one of these was continuity of leadership.

Yin (2003) provided further guidance regarding data analysis:

> Regardless of the choice of strategies or techniques, a persistent challenge is to produce high-quality analyses, which require investigators to attend to *all* the evidence, display and present the evidence separate of any interpretation, and show adequate concern for exploring alternative interpretations. (p. 109).

Graduate student and faculty interviews for each case study were re-read and sorted by category to write the case studies. As this research did not use discourse analysis, all participants' interviews were edited for clarity – removing for example "um," repeated "you know" and unnecessary word repetition. For example "But the, the um, you know the research forums…" became "The research forums…"

Case Study 1: AGES 2001-2002

A sense of isolation and a desire to form a connection with other graduate students and the Faculty of Education were themes that emerged in Case Study 1. The faculty participant also identified the limitations of short-term leadership as an issue that

affected AGES. This case study supports the idea that faculty members play an important role by providing continuity and resources for graduate student associations. The graduate student participant was Beatrix and the faculty participant was Dr. Pace. I chose the name Beatrix for this participant because it means *voyager, traveller*. The name is also associated with the Latin *beatus* "blessed" and Beatrix is both a traveller and someone who considers herself blessed. Beatrix was the 2001-2002 AGES committee as there were no other students organizing AGES events. I chose the name Dr. Pace, because it means *peace*, as it was a theme that was reflected in this participant's interview.

While AGES was created in the mid-1990s, it became dormant for a period of time. I have not been able to identify how long a period of time this was as none of my informants provided this information and I do not know myself. It could have been a month, a term, a year or more. This situation reflects the culture of graduate student associations and one of its many challenges:

> One of the challenges that groups like this face all the time is around continuity of leadership, because the life span of a graduate student is really very short. I mean if you come in and you take two or three years to do a masters degree and then off you go into something else, leadership is just starting to get rolling, they just get a feel for the organization, they start to build some networks, they start to get some initiatives up and running and then they are no longer a graduate student. So there is a high turnover in terms of leadership and in fact membership so it makes it hard to build cohesiveness and continuity when you have a structure that, where the life span of graduate life is a two to three year window. (Dr. Pace)

AGES was resurrected because Beatrix actively sought out a means of engaging with others. She entered her PhD program "interested in having a sense of belonging in the Faculty of Education specially." Faculty participants, without exception, were supportive of AGES and believed there was value to this type of organization.

> I think [AGES] is a valuable thing to have. I think one of the strengths that they do is they provide a forum for graduate students to get together and talk about thing that may be of concern to them all, whether it's with a program or direction for research or have forum or a venue for people to interact with faculty outside of classes. (Dr. Pace)

Dr. Pace described how his role and relationship with AGES changed over time. As previously noted, turnover in a student association is high and organizational memory is short. Dr. Pace was most involved when the students were reliant on him for information and guidance. As the group became stronger and developed internal resources, their reliance on Dr. Pace's knowledge was reduced. "So I was, how would I put it, politely uninvited to continue? Asked not to continue to attend those meetings." This invitation to become less involved came at a time when AGES had begun "to develop initiative and develop a direction." Dr. Pace retained a connection with the first AGES group by providing financial and administrative support. Beatrix felt very supported when she later approached the Associate Dean about resurrecting AGES.

> He was really, really a key person in helping with the reorganization of AGES. So I worked closely with him at that time, and he was very supportive organizing the social events or providing us with some money for food and posters or whatever photocopies and things that were needed. (Beatrix)

Beatrix described herself as the "glue person" who brought people together. Her participation in AGES grew out of a personal need to belong to her Faculty. "I felt isolated and I felt that there wasn't much in the sense of interaction." Beatrix met with another doctoral student who reassured her that she was not alone in her feelings of isolation. Beatrix commented that she "projected that need or sense of belonging into wanting to feel rooted within the faculty, in having a place other than just, you know, having a mailbox on the second floor and that's the end of it." After discovering she was not the only graduate student feeling isolated, Beatrix decided to organize a social event

noting that, " the more gatherings I organized, the more that people agreed they would also like to meet others." People seemed motivated to attend events because it meant "they were not alone, and they were not the only one having difficulties or struggles as grad students."

The department's graduate secretary approached Beatrix and asked her to become the graduate student representative for the GSS. Beatrix attended GSS grad council meetings. In the beginning Beatrix was the only representative from the Faculty of Education. Being asked by the graduate secretary to become a graduate representative was very powerful and empowering for Beatrix.

> I felt really good and I felt trusted with that role and responsibility…I took the role in a very serious way, and I felt a responsibility to be a voice for the needs of graduate students. When I was asked to belong to this committee it meant that my opinion was been taken into account. That I was been respected. That I was considered somebody who could contribute with something at different times. (Beatrix)

Beatrix saw herself as a link between faculty and the larger student body. "My role was to inform grad students in the Faculty of Education of things that were happening… and at the same time convey the needs of grad students within the Faculty of Education to the GSS." Beatrix communicated with other graduate students by writing an email newsletter that was distributed through the graduate secretaries' offices.

Beatrix was one of two international participants in this study. Her role as AGES president and the resulting duties in the Faculty of Education had a positive effect on her transition to Canada. "It was very important for me to have that sense of being trusted. You know even if I was a foreigner who was not raised in Canada, that was very important…that was really, really meaningful."

Beatrix reinforced the importance of relationships in the wider education community when she commented, "that also made me establish stronger bonds and better relationships with some people with whom, I probably would have never established a connection had I not belonged to AGES." She also commented on her relationship with other graduate students who assisted with event planning, people "who were always there and constant, just, even if (we) went out for lunch or just took a little break."

As one of three doctoral student participants, Beatrix made a distinction between masters and doctoral students. Reflecting on the connections that masters students can make in classes, Beatrix commented, "as a doctoral student that doesn't happen, because everybody is doing their own thing and their own research and it's really isolating." Beatrix did not want to be "one more person that will just pass through these halls and that's the end." For Beatrix "it was very important to do a little bit more than that, or to be a little bit more than that." Meaningful situations for Beatrix included being asked to be a part of a Faculty of Education search committee and being asked to be part of a conference organizing committee.

In considering the diversity of graduate students in the Faculty of Education Beatrix said, "You know we need to educate people into being compassionate and tolerate and accepting and just humane with each other. We're wasting time and energy and human resources every time a grad student just comes and goes attending courses." Summing up her AGES experience, Beatrix commented:

> When there's a lot of work there are satisfactions when one gets a good grade, when you have an exam and you're done with it, but I think the outcomes of the interactions and those times that one has while one is a part of the Faculty, those are times that won't come back, those are times that as a student, that's the life of the student and for most people it's over

> within a certain number of years, and then that's it. And then you miss it. (Beatrix)

In considering whether AGES activities had been successful, Beatrix commented, "we closed in April when there were, I don't know, 30 some people and faculty members (and that) is really meaningful." Case Study 1 presented the revival of AGES that was led by one graduate student who was supported by the Associate Dean. Motivated by her own desire to have a sense of belonging to the faculty, she created the first AGES *ripple* in this case study. This *ripple* grew into a *wave* in Case Study 2 as more students joined the AGES committee in pursuit of a sense of belonging.

Case Study 2: AGES 2002-2003

While feelings of isolation and a desire to belong continued as themes in Case Study 2, new themes also emerged including: (a) an awareness of University politics amongst AGES committee member, (b) AGES role as an advocate for graduate students in Education, and (c) an interest in AGES work benefiting others. Case Study 2 was also about forming community and managing change as the organizing agency moved from one person to six people. This is the longest case study description, reflecting the many changes and new ideas that emerged with AGES structural change to a committee format. Graduate student participants were Booker, Fina and Anna. The faculty participant was Dr. Nia. I chose the names Booker, Fina, and Anna for the following meanings: Booker means maker of books and Booker has a particular connection with books. Fina is short for Seraphina or *fiery one* and Fina smoldered with a quiet fire in her work with AGES. Anna means *favour* or *grace* and this participant brought a quiet grace to AGES work in 2002-2003. I chose the name Dr. Nia because it means *bright* and *purpose,* as these were themes that were reflected in this participant's interview.

Booker had the strongest memories of the three participants and her interview was used as a framework for this period; Fina and Anna's experiences as well as Dr. Nia's were included to complement or contrast Booker's perceptions.

Faculty members continued to play an important role in helping to raise awareness about AGES amongst the graduate students. Dr. Nia invited the AGES coordinator to welcome students to the Summer Research Forum. Graduate students became more politically aware in Case Study 2, as reflected in their lobbying faculty members for more resources. Dr. Nia commented that, "we certainly heard that there was a wish for more things to be available for the larger group of graduate students."

As Dr. Pace observed in the first case study, the organizational memory of a graduate student group or association is very short term. I was the only member of this case study who had attended AGES events the previous year. There was no organizational memory of when and how AGES had been originally established, just a tacit awareness that it had been active, went dormant, and now was reviving. As the coordinator I began to recruit new committee members at the Summer Research Forum. Booker and Anna both heard about AGES at this research forum. Booker had been in the Faculty of Education for almost a year at that time. Although made aware of AGES through this introduction, Booker did not consider joining at this time. Her sense of isolation prevented her from making a connection.

> Well at that meeting [the coordinator] talked about wanting to recruit people to sit with [her] and do the planning of AGES. And I didn't know what it meant and it actually didn't even cross my mind at that point in time to volunteer, because again I did feel a sense of isolation and hadn't known anyone else except for the group of people I went to classes with. (Booker)

AGES was also challenged by low visibility within the Faculty of Education and faculty participant interviews suggested that it was only when faculty members moved into roles that included a graduate student focus that AGES became meaningful. Dr. Nia commented on the situation that, "we always mention it. But there is something about visibility." Supporting Dr. Nia's observation was Anna's comment that she did not have any strong impressions of AGES before she joined the group. "It was a body that was representing graduate students, but I didn't know if it was a social body or academic or I didn't know anything about it actually." Anna heard about AGES at the forum and she responded to the invitation by deciding to find out more about how to become involved. Booker and Fina identified a feeling of isolation in their comments regarding their motivations for joining the group.

> I love to do things that are going to benefit others and knowing what I had just gone through which was nine months of grad school without a support system in place and then being able to be a support system for somebody else made me feel really good…I brought ideas to the table, they were accepted and valued and it just continued. The group was fantastic. (Booker)

> I remember you know, [a faculty member]'s energy was really positive about it and [the coordinator] was really positive about it and I thought there's something going on here that I just think would be really cool to be a part of, and to be honest, I'd been kind of looking for a niche, you know I'd been looking for a place to be at the University…and I hadn't really found my place. (Fina)

Anna described the atmosphere of the first meeting she attended as a new AGES committee member. "It was just really, really wonderful to connect with other people that were interested in making connections, and sharing experiences, and then…thinking of how … we could make it community oriented." The newly formed AGES committee began by discussing what it wanted AGES to be. Booker described AGES this way:

> The Association of Graduate Education Students was to bridge the gap between faculty and the graduate students and to support grad students in their entire pursuit going through grad school, but also with their research so that we as grad students could feel a cohesive part of the faculty rather than just the students who were facilitating faculty's work. I think we built those social pieces in there to be a support system for each other and so we could talk about the pursuits that were often difficult and adverse for those of us undertaking jobs, or family life at the same time as pursuing grad school. (Booker)

Fina described how she felt when she joined the AGES committee. "It was key because I think it was one of the indications of community, for me. I guess I felt like I'd really arrived then." Like Beatrix, Fina also observed connections with other graduate students she would not have met had it not been for AGES.

Booker described the AGES committee planning as "phenomenal" and "fun." The AGES committee structure allowed members to be flexible in their participation and contribution. I know I sometimes did absolutely nothing and other times I did a bigger part and we shifted" (Booker).

Fina observed changes in her relationship with faculty members. "it would spark conversation and connections with professors who would then acknowledge your work as an AGES member and thank you for it. Perhaps respect you a little more for it." Fina also noted that AGES provided "opportunities to take risks myself, to watch other people take risks." Finally, AGES provided Fina with "an opportunity for me to watch how events are organized outside of the public school setting."

Two events that reflected the values of this Case Study were a Faculty of Education Orientation and Third Thursday, an informal event where faculty presented their research. Food and an opportunity for faculty and graduate students to socialize with one another followed the presentations. The three graduate participants in this case study felt a strong connection to the Faculty Orientation. Fina reflected on both her own

transition and her later experiences as an AGES member organizing the Faculty orientation for new graduate students in Education. "I always felt really welcomed in my courses, but it was harder, it was harder outside of that. So I was really interested in and enjoyed being part of the orientation process especially when it was new."

Booker had moved to Victoria the day before classes began and anticipated her program's orientation. "It was a very quick overview of the program." Approximately 30 students attended the Faculty orientation and Anna described the *ripple* and how this event affected her subsequent relationship with other graduate students in her classes:

> I know just from talking to other students that were taking classes with me that had been to the orientation [organized by AGES and the Faculty that] they felt really lucky to have been a part of it and they learned a lot from it. They felt more confident about going into their classes and the program. And they knew that they could always come to me and I could find out through the [AGES] committee. (Anna)

The Faculty of Education attracts mature students who have established careers in professions such as teaching and nursing. Fina described the transition to full-time graduate student. "You come in and its like your cloak, your career cloak is taken off you and another one is put on and you're just a student. And that was kind of hard for me, but I got used to it."

AGES introduced Third Thursdays in the Fall term of Case Study 2 as a means of connecting graduate students and faculty members. Booker said that, "every third Thursday we would (ask) faculty to come and speak about their research to enhance research within the graduate student group." This event began a process of introducing graduate students to faculty members with whom that they might not otherwise come into contact. All graduate students in the faculty had the opportunity to listen to faculty members present their research. While students attended Third Thursday to learn about a

topic, they were also motivated by the experience of meeting other graduate students and the resulting feeling that "I am not the only one in this situation."

Anna commented that Third Thursdays built a sense of community, "I just really like the fact that we were learning from the faculty members and they were also learning from us." Anna also observed that faculty members talking about their research also helped students. "[You] got your head out of your own research for a minute and saw what other people were doing and could learn from that. When the professors were talking about their research, it made you see where you were headed." Fina talked about a faculty member's presentation:

> I remember the interaction as just being so positive, to finally be in a room where there were faculty members and students, because normally you get this situation in a university environment, which is professor stands up in front of graduate students and feeds information to them. And discussions occur and that kind of thing, but there is very much that clear hierarchy going on. And, I guess in this particular instance, I remember her being so thankful to be invited into a situation where she was able to present to her colleagues, but also able to present to graduate students.

Faculty interviews reflected their view that their presentations were well received by graduate students, but that attendance was often small. Faculty enjoyed being asked to present their research to graduate students. Dr. Pace commented, "It was good. I mean I enjoyed it. It's nice to have an audience that's keen and appreciative. It's always a pleasure presenting to graduate students" and Dr. Nia supported this perspective with her comment that, "it was well organized…attendance wasn't too bad for those kinds of things I guess. It was very positive, very well received." Dr. Nia also talked about her motivation for supporting AGES and her role as a faculty member. "Because I think it's important. Because I want to support graduate students." Faculty connections were important to graduate student participants as reflected in a number of comments. Booker

said that "anything you did as AGES you needed to be supported by the faculty. Reflecting back on the relationship that developed with faculty members, Booker said:

> I remember getting at least a couple of thank you letters from people at the University level, you know thanking me as an AGES member for my involvement. So I think they saw AGES as contributing to the quality of student life and we saw that we couldn't do our work without them as well. (Booker)

While graduate student participants identified a number of faculty members as influencing their decision to participate on the AGES committee, faculty participants did not identify this role for themselves. When asked how she believed graduate students in her program would hear about AGES events, Dr. Nia suggested, "probably web or email." The importance of faculty and staff support *rippled* through the graduate participants' interviews. Support took a number of forms, including presenting at events and providing resources such as use of a photocopier and funding for events. Booker included the AGES bulletin board and the AGES mailbox in the Faculty general office as further evidence of support.

Research is central to graduate student life. One of the most important connections was with the Faculty of Education's Research Culture Committee. The AGES coordinator worked with Chair of this committee and the graduate research assistant who supported the committee's work. Fina described her observations of the relationship between the AGES coordinator and chair of the Research Culture Committee

> The interactions were positive, they were collegial, they were collaborative, but I also remember it being, you know boundary setting in the sense that [the AGES coordinator] had to both promote AGES and also really almost express a student voice at the same time. (Fina)

AGES provided opportunities for members to learn new skills. Fina described her experience as an AGES committee member. Reflecting on her AGES experiences, Fina commented:

> One of the things that I did learn a lot was about PR. And politics and it's made me much more savvy in my workplace now than I ever was before. And so understanding we need to build bridges with people…it was a real opportunity to understand how to work within a very large organization. And for me now, when I do work within a very large organization, I really understand how much politics and how much the connections and the relationships matter.

As AGES moved from a single coordinator to a committee structure, members developed a sense of trust and connection with each other. In one instance, two AGES committee members discovered they had both "cried the whole night" when their ethical reviews were returned. One of the graduate participant in talking about this situation described the importance of AGES as follows:

> Because the whole concept of AGES is bringing together graduate Education students and apart from classes, once you head into the research stage you loose an opportunity. Or there's less of an opportunity to be face-to-face with graduate students and yet, at the same time you're entering one of the most important parts and the make or break part of your graduate program. I guess the way I see it, right at the time when you finish your coursework, you've had all this wonderful connection with all these students and you've done projects together, and then all of a sudden, the structure of the courses goes. Right at the time when you're entering the phase of your graduate program that really makes or breaks whether you graduate and yet the time to come together disappears. (Fina)

In January the Associate Dean's office sent a letter to the AGES coordinator informing the group of a decision that had been made regarding the reallocation of space in the MacLaurin building and that graduate students would now share the faculty and staff lounge. Over time this arrangement has worked well, but Booker describes the loss of a designated graduate space at that time:

> It kind of made us more visible, and our presence was known over time with that. I think that went by the wayside a little bit when we had to move into the new environment. (Booker)

Booker described how joining AGES changed her experience of graduate school. "I think that [AGES] was the most important part of my graduate experience. AGES was a big part not only of my own personal support system for my courses and my thesis, but just being involved and feeling a strong part of the Faculty and the campus." Fina echoed Booker's comment when she said that, "well I guess like joining anything, you feel more of a member the more involved you get, right."

The 2002 to 2003 case study was a period of growth for AGES. As in other year's activities, programming reflected the interests of the members and was often motivated by participants' own experiences. In Case Study 2 we saw a change in the structure of AGES with the introduction of an AGES committee and a broadening of activities that included both social and academic events. Graduate students gained stronger representation on Faculty of Education committees and AGES committee members gained greater political awareness, a *ripple* that continued in future case studies. Faculty members also became more aware of graduate students' interest in additional support in this case study, another *ripple* that continued in future cases.

Case Study 3: AGES 2003-2004

I remained the AGES coordinator during Case Study 3, providing continuity between committees. Booker, although no longer active on the committee retained a connection with AGES as well. All other committee members were new and this created an opportunity for further change. With the departure of three key committee members and the addition of four new committee members, new *ripples* began that reflected changing interests. Faculty member's awareness of AGES was greater as AGES moved

into its third year of activity. This case study saw the beginnings of a change in participants' attitudes about AGES relationship with faculty members. Graduate students moved into a more collegial relationship as they co-presented their research at Third Thursday. This changing attitude, while a *ripple* in Case Study 3 became more of a *wave* in Case Study 4, a *wave* reminiscent of Dr. Pace's experience of being "uninvited" by AGES after it was established in 1998. The graduate student in Case Study 3 were Fionna, Kate, Three. The faculty participant was Dr. Daina. I chose the name Fionna; Kate and Three chose their own code names. I chose Fionna because it means *fair* and this suited Fionna and her approach to AGES and her research. I chose the name Dr. Daina, which means *song,* as it was a theme reflected in this participant's interview.

Of the three participants selected for this case study, Fionna is the only one whose time with AGES was limited to the period of this case study. Her transcript has therefore been selected as the foundation for this section. Both Kate and Three's transcripts informed Case Study 3 and Case Study 4, just as Booker's informed Case Study 2 and Case Study 3.

Although students' awareness of AGES and its activities was still low, faculty members were becoming more aware of AGES and its recent increased level of activity.

> When I first came I heard that there was a graduate student association, but it didn't seem to be active. It perhaps had been active earlier. Since that time it has become much more active and has its own program of seminars and there seems to be a lot of informal networks of graduate students getting together and so my impression is that for the last 2 ½ years or so it has become quite active and quite an important part of the graduate culture in the Faculty. (Dr. Daina)

Fionna had not formed a strong impression of AGES before she joined the committee. A faculty member suggested she join the group when she expressed an interest in becoming involved on campus. Kate also did not have a strong impression of

AGES. Three was aware of the bulletin board and heard about AGES from one of the committee members.

> I am not really one for social events, so just knowing there was an association of graduate education students, it really didn't mean that much to me. But the fact that it was something that could further my professional development, I decided, okay. I don't know about other people, but I find just knowing what an organization is and that it represents a certain group of people in no way motivates me to be a part of it, even if I am a part of that cohort group. It means nothing to me until I actually know the types of activities they are involved in, how they affect life on campus, how they affect the life of the members. Only then will my interest be peeked. (Three)

Personal connections made by joining the association changed graduate participants' impressions of AGES. Participants said that AGES reflected the diversity of the Faculty of Education. "By joining AGES I felt as though I was starting to learn more about each of those types of students and then [I was] able to represent those different groups of students" (Fionna). AGES events provided a conduit for students interested in learning more about AGES or considering volunteering. A strong desire to have a sense of belonging continued to motivate participants. In Case Study 3, AGES also grew in terms of the type of support it provided to graduate students.

> Shortly after I became involved with AGES, my time as a graduate student became a little more complicated. AGES provided spectacular resources for me to turn to in regards to what type of rights I had and what type of steps I could take in my situation. And they also just provided a sounding board and a friendly ear. [They] were never judgmental. And for me that was really important. It meant that there was a place for me as a graduate student to turn to, other graduate students. To just sort of sort through some of the things I was going through and that was probably the most important thing in regard to what I got out of quote unquote, from being in AGES. (Fionna)

Recognition of the student-to-student support that AGES could provide was also identified by faculty members:

> It's very difficult, there's so much stuff, a lot of kind of the tricks of the trade are really tacit knowledge, it's kinds of things that are picked up by individuals and passed on, so a healthy AGES becomes a really important piece of building the culture of graduate education in the Faculty. (Dr. Daina)

Student participants also commented that AGES had the potential to be a catalyst for political action. "There may be opportunities in the future to mobilize different group action or to even just to use it as collective power to support students, to support whatever might come up" (Kate).

Themes found in the literature about student engagement and *currere* were reflected in a faculty member's comment that "the good part about AGES is that it [is] graduate students organizing for their own learning." He also said that:

> The more that graduate students through AGES can articulate what they need and organize for their own learning, the more effective it's going to be. And it can't help but strengthen [and] contribute to the research culture and the learning culture for graduate studies in the Faculty. (Dr. Daina)

The GSS played a significant role in each case study. Some participants talked about how their position on AGES led them to become a graduate student representative on the GSS Grad Council. These experiences provided participants with a broader perspective on how decision made at an institutional level affects all graduate students.

> It was interesting to see how some of the decisions that they were making filtered through into the faculties and into the departments. Things that had to do with funding for research, or graduate student bursaries or conference money, money to travel and do things like that. And I think that I learned a lot, personally as a graduate student, from sitting on that committee and that also made me that much more aware that if I didn't know these things, probably other graduate students didn't know those things. And so, it helped to sort of push that information forward. (Fionna)

Fionna described activities that she was involved with as an AGES committee member. They included planning social events and sitting on Faculty of Education

committees. Social Activities were perceived by graduate participants as providing an important connection to other students:

> I can think of a handful of people who were more mature students with young families who felt very disengaged from the University and from the department. [They were] experiencing difficult classes or thesis delays or things, and particularly[at] the summer barbecue that we were able to host I think [it] really allowed a lot of those students to come together and realize that there were other students who were having the same type of problems in that type of class. (Fionna)

The Research Culture Committee began to work more collaboratively with AGES in Case Study 3. Part way through the Winter term, the Committee's research assistant met with AGES committee members to explore ideas and to identify issues of concern. The major topic identified through these discussions was how graduate students can prepare for presenting at conferences, including poster sessions. This topic was of particular interest in light of the upcoming Faculty of Education Connections Conference. The success of this partnership was reflected in the increased attendance at the Spring forum:

> We had one [research forum] in July…it was okay attendance; it wasn't great. But for the amount of work that was done, it was sparsely attended. The second one was very poorly attended, and then the third one, where [the research assistant] had the consult and contribution from AGES, was well attended. We had, I believe it was 60 people come to the introduction and then we had breakout sessions. (Booker)

AGES committee members formed different relationships with faculty members outside of the classroom. Fionna described being a member of the Faculty of Education's Graduate Programs Advisory Committee.

> I would say that my opinion [on the Graduate Program Advisory Council] was definitely respected and that I felt as though I was offering a perspective that the professors on the committee were not necessarily aware of. And that made me very happy. (Fionna)

Graduate student participants identified bringing the student perspective to Faculty of Education committees as an important contribution. This ripple was repeated again in Case Study 4.

> It seemed to me that some of the things that I had had students express to me, were not things that these faculty members were aware of. Things along the lines of difficulties with supervisors, or not being able to get the classes they wanted, but that's not necessarily what I am trying to say, because they were aware that class offerings had always been a problem (Fionna)

Fionna also highlighted the different needs of students who wanted to pursue a research degree, compared to those pursuing "hands-on" degrees. She was concerned that were "a number of students who weren't feeling they were getting either of those very well."

AGES also offered opportunities for graduate students to work collaboratively with faculty members. Fionna described her positive response to this collaborative process:

> [It made] me feel as though I was been taken very seriously and it was a very respectful exchange of ideas and opinions, which I shouldn't say is a rarity, but its one of those things where it is very poignant to me that the ideas that I was expressing were been taken very seriously. (Fionna)

Fionna and Kate described different aspect of the meaning they found from joining and belonging to AGES. Kate perhaps best summed up the experience:

> It's the snowball effect. You know, one committee leads to another, one contact leads to another, one idea leads to another and so for me, AGES was the first step in that snowball process. (Kate)

Case Study 3 ended with three AGES committee members continuing into another year. I stepped down as the AGES coordinator and passed the reigns onto a new leader. The year ended with expectations of change; of new *ripples* and *waves* that would reflect a new vision for AGES. Graduate students' relationship with faculty members would continue to change and committee membership would continue to grow.

Case Study 4: AGES 2004-2005

The new AGES coordinator brought a greater focus to the role of graduate students on Faculty of Education committees. Being a graduate student voice on Faculty committees was an important theme in Case Study 4. The AGES committee expanded its membership in Case Study 4 and there was a greater range of experience amongst members. Graduate participants were Wanda, Sandra and Sarah. The faculty participant was Dr. Garth. Wanda and Sarah selected their own names. I chose Sandra's name because it means *to defend* and *to help* – values that I associate with Sandra. This case study was supplemented with interviews with Kate and Three who continues with the AGES committee from 2003-2004. I chose the name Dr. Garth, which means *garden,* as it was a theme reflected in this participant's interview. Compared with the earlier case studies, some of the participants in this case study had formed impressions about AGES prior to joining the AGES committee. However, even after joining the AGES committee other participants were still unsure about their role. Wanda noted that it was a connection to an AGES committee member had influenced her decision to join. This personal connection was a *ripple* that was observed in all of the earlier case studies. Demonstrating a clearer understanding of AGES role was this description by one of the participants.

> My impression was that AGES is intended to be one part advocacy group, one part social coordinator, one part solidarity type group for graduate students in Education. We have a huge population of graduate students in Education and very few of us know each other. So some sort of cohesive, binding unit, a big piece of Lego needs to be there to bring all the different graduate students together and give them a central place where they can get to know each other, get to know about what's going on, suggest services that graduate students would like and just generally be sort of a clearing house for communicating with other graduate students. (Wanda)

Reasons for joining AGES included (a) a perception that it would be a low risk activity, (b) that it was a way to contribute to other students' understanding of graduate life on this campus, and (c) that being a graduate student representative on a Faculty committee could be beneficial on your curriculum vitae.

> I was kind of excited about being on committees, because I'd never done that before. To try something new and I also liked the idea of having a voice and never really thought about that before. And [that] my experiences and the experiences of my peers [would] make the Education program better. (Sarah)

Sandra was one of the two international student participants. Both international participants were interested in supporting other international students.

> I am interested in playing a role, a bridge between Canadian students and international students, because I am an also an international student, and I've been here for quite a while and I think I have had this interest for a long time.

Being an international student can add another layer of complexity to a graduate student's experiences. "I have experienced a lot of funny thing, and misunderstandings, miscommunications. Sometimes with bitter consequences, but you know they're all learning experiences" (Sandra).

Sandra and Sarah were both looking for volunteer opportunities, ways to become involved on campus. The structure of AGES allowed them as committee members the freedom to act, to take initiative, even to take risks. Supported by the AGES committee, Sarah organized a successful workshop. At the time of the interview, Sarah was just starting to plan the event. She expressed uncertainty about being in this leadership role.

> I haven't really done anything yet, because I'm not really sure what to do, but I've been thinking about it, so I think I know what to do now. But just to find information can be fearful a little bit, because I'm not really sure I know what I'm talking about.

Wanda, who was a PhD student, described organizing a workshop in a very different way:

> [The workshop] came about because at the first AGES meeting that I attended, it was mentioned that this was something that had sort of been tossed around as been needed and we should really do something about it. So I said "Hey, I'll take that on."

Connections with other PhD students were important for doctoral graduate participants.

> And I've learned a lot from my peers, in terms of how they've managed situations with their committee members, with their supervisor. So those were the sorts of things, it was more a support group than an activities group, although I'm hoping that we will get into some activities as well. And in fact this "How to Publish" workshop came out of the PhD group. And Wanda took that on, thank goodness, because she's doing an excellent job. (Kate)

Finding common ground was a recurring theme for both international and Canadian student participants:

> Just being able to be with other graduate students from Education, but not necessarily our program and hearing their experiences of being a graduate student and being able to share mine and having that common ground with one another, because being a graduate student's a whole different world than undergrad and it's a whole different world than just working. It's very unique and it's hard to explain how you feel about things without another person being in that situation, so I think that was very meaningful for me. (Sarah)

The focus moved from social events for graduate students and faculty members to events for just graduate students in Case Study 4. As continuing AGES committee members, both Three and Kate played significant roles in coordinating the summer pizza party and the winter social. "Over the summer we had our Pizza Party, which was a huge success for PE students" (Three). The winter social was meaningful for a number of

graduate participants. Sarah described attending the event before becoming an AGES committee member:

> [It] was very positive and I felt like there was a whole bunch of people. There wasn't just the AGES committee people, but I felt like it was a place where you automatically connect, just because of the graduate student thing. And that you're all in Education and you don't get that very much in Education because there is no where for us to be, because we don't have offices and so you're isolated quite a bit. The interaction was very positive and also, you know AGES tends to have people who are more experienced as a graduate student, so I really enjoyed that aspect of of them knowing what it was like for a first year graduate student. I really appreciated that because I didn't really have to explain anything or they just kinda knew. (Sarah)

Although the relationship was changing, relationships with faculty members continued to be important to AGES committee members. Wanda talked about a conversation she had had with the chair of the Research Culture Committee and contacting faculty members to present at AGES.

> I've been speaking to the chair of the Research Culture Committee. They're very excited that we are doing this [workshop] and they're being very helpful with it. They're providing funds for refreshments. And based on the evaluations we get back after the workshop, because I intend to get as many people as possible to fill in an evaluation form before they go, will figure out what is needed and what kind of information needs to be out there and hopefully this will become an annual event put on by AGES and the Research Culture Committee. (Wanda)

For participants who were new and less established in the Faculty, representing graduate students on a committee was a powerful experience.

> I think what was significant was being on the committee for the associate dean. We only met once and we are meeting again next week, but I remember just sitting in the room, feeling very young (laughter) and I felt really good about myself. I felt proud of being able to represent all the graduate students. I didn't say anything, but I still felt proud that they had to look at me in my eyes and make sure that they remembered that the reason they're there is for the student. (Sarah)

Faculty members were very supportive of AGES initiatives, including presenting at workshops. One faculty member donated a tape recorder and transcriber to AGES for graduate students' use after talking with Three and Kate. Communicating with AGES members, that is all graduate students in the faculty, continued to be a challenge, although one participant created an AGES listserv. Participants talked about the influence of AGES on their lives. Wanda said, "I think the simple fact that AGES exists, that both students put something together like this, faculty support it, because there is support within the Faculty for AGES definitely, that to me is very meaningful." Sandra and Sarah shared reflections about how AGES changed them.

> I think it kind of changed the way I feel about myself (laughter)…I guess I became more outspoken, which is a good thing to me, because I'd been having this struggle all the way through my university student's life and graduate student's life as well. (Sandra)

> I think it's all our voices. But I think the biggest thing I learned is that my voice makes a difference, because I never really thought that before. I definitely thought other peoples' voices made a difference (laughter) and especially loud ones because I'm not a loud person, I'm very shy and quiet and wasn't angry (laughter), so often I feel like it doesn't really matter how my experience was, my graduate experience, but I'm learning that it does and it can make a difference in the future. (Sarah)

AGES still faces challenges, perhaps the biggest is continuity in leadership. A faculty participant identified the physical layout of the Faculty of Education in two buildings as an issue, as well as the mix of full and part-time students. "[AGES has] got a difficult task in this Faculty, because so many of our students are part-time and [AGES] has tried to serve those people by putting forward the needs of that group in the Faculty" (Dr. Garth). Breaking down barriers and improving communications remains a challenge. From the student perspective Wanda said, "that I wanted very much to be on AGES, to have AGES behind me." An association, such as AGES created possibilities. "I think it

starts with socialization, but you need a support group for other reasons as well. Partially germination of ideas and stimulation of ideas and that's been lacking I think in this Faculty" (Dr. Garth). Case Study 4 saw the tide change with a greater focus on graduate student connections and a change in attitude towards faculty members. Graduate students also started to see themselves differently. They recognized the value in their own voice.

Major and Unique Topics

Categories were created from the data to identify commonalties and outlying data. These categories were used to write the case studies and later cross-referenced to identify major topics that crossed case studies and topics that were unique to a case study or a participant group[1]. While the term *category* has been used, it is important to note that the content of that category can change from one case study to another. For instance, one topic was *motivation.* This is the term used to categorize the various reasons participants stated that they joined the AGES committee.

Beatrix's interview provided the initial list of topics. Twelve major topics and twelve unique topics were identified from re-reading the student interview for the first case study. Topics continued to be refined as interview data was sorted into the categories. Spreadsheet was created to cross-reference categories across case studies. These spreadsheets were then used to sort the data in relation to these three questions:

1. How does being a part of the AGES committee affect students?
2. How does AGES influence graduate students' interactions with each other?
3. How do interactions with AGES committee members influence faculty?

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[1] Case Studies 1, 3, and 4 had informants who made specific references to the role of the coordinator. No participant made reference to the coordinator role in Case Study 2, however as the coordinator during that time I believe many of the observations made by participants in Case Studies 1, 3 and 4 would be equally

The third question was not clearly answered by the data. Another question emerged through the data analysis that was linked to this question and that was, *how do interactions with faculty members influence AGES?*

In each of the following sections, the categories have been sorted to reflect participants' responses as they relate to the three research questions. For each question the categories become *ripples* and collectively a *wave* that responded to the inquiry.

How does being a part of AGES affect student?

Motivation

Motivation was the category created for the reasons graduate student participants joined the AGES committee. How did these motivations affect students? Graduate student participants commented that AGES was not active when the participant in Case Study 1 joined the Faculty of Education. The participant said that she did felt isolated and that very few students knew each other. She was interested in developing a sense of belonging and having stronger ties between faculty members and graduate students. Participants in Case Study 2 shared an interest in stronger ties between faculty and graduate students and also had an interest in developing a sense of belonging. Faculty relationships were important to participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 and participants in Case Studies 2, 3 and 4 all expressed an interest in finding connections and being involved in the Faculty of Education. For participants in Case Studies 3 and 4, this was manifested in being the graduate representative on a Faculty of Education committee. A participant in Case Study 3 wanted a connection to other PhD students and all three PhD students made reference to their doctoral experiences. Participants in Case Study 4 were

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true in Case Study 2. The following sections addressed the three main research questions with graduate student responses in regular type and faculty members' responses

unique in stating that they liked the idea of having a voice and recognized that their experiences mattered. One participant was critical of departmental control of listserv messages. A couple of participants commented that AGES looked risk-free and joined because friends were joining.

Catalyst

Catalyst was the category created to reflect participants' sense that they were creating change by being a part of the AGES committee. How did catalyst affect individual participants? Graduate student participants in Case Studies 1, 3, and 4 all stated that they were a voice for other graduate students. A participant in Case Study 2 wanted to help connect new students to the Faculty of Education and a participant in Case Study 3 wanted to form a communication network amongst graduate students.

Action

Action was the category created to describe the actions of individual AGES members. What actions affected participants as individuals? Graduate student participants commented that in Case Study 1 that it was meaningful to belong to a Faculty committee. Belonging to a committee was of particular importance to participants in Case Study 4, although all participants valued this experience.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection was the category that was created to describe what the participants perceived or learned. What did participants learn about themselves? Graduate student participants in all four case studies stated that they learned a lot while being part of AGES. Participants in Case Studies 1, 3, and 4 stated that they have a different relationship and feel more comfortable with faculty because of their involvement with

AGES. Observations that were unique to Case Study 4 included the realization that organizing events can be very intimidating. This statement was made because the participant was not sure what to do. Participants also expressed awareness that expectations are higher in graduate school. It was also noted that students who get involved with AGES tend to be staying on-campus to complete their degrees. Participants also recognized that AGES members are representing someone else and that this is a responsibility.

Outcomes

Outcomes was the category used to describe what was meaningful. What outcomes were meaningful for participants as individuals? Graduate student participants commented on three observations that were shared by participants in Case Studies 1, 2, and 4. These observations were that participants were recognized in the Faculty of Education because of their work with AGES; through AGES you learn how the University works; and that "I was somebody who could make a difference." Participants in Case Studies 1 and 2 stated that AGES gave them a sense of belonging and that you feel more a member the more involved you get. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 observed that AGES create a situation for graduate students and faculty to present as colleagues. They also observed that AGES makes sure that the student voice is heard in Education.

How does AGES influence graduate students' interactions with each other?

Awareness of AGES

Awareness of AGES was the category created to describe the participants' prior knowledge of AGES before joining the committee. How did awareness of AGES

influence graduate students' interactions with each other? Graduate student participants commented that the first case study is the only one where the graduate student participant knew nothing about AGES. Having an awareness of AGES was not a motivator, but it did allow for greater interaction between students who would not have otherwise met. Students in each of the later three cases were aware that AGES was a body representing graduate students in the Faculty of Education and many learned about the association through an AGES committee member. The connection may have been formed at a presentation or in some instances because the committee member was a friend. Participants in Case Studies 3 and 4 were also aware of AGES as a group that organized professional development activities.

Faculty participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 stated that *a healthy AGES* became a really important piece of building the culture of graduate education in the Faculty of Education.

Action

Action was the category created to describe the actions of individual AGES members. How did individual actions influence graduate students' interactions with each other? Participants in all case studies supported communication with other graduate students in a number of ways, including creating or managing the AGES website, newsletters, posters, AGES bulletin board, departmental mailings and an AGES listserv. Participants in Case Studies 1, 3 and 4 identified the significance of being a graduate representative and providing a connection between the GSS and students in the Faculty of Education. Participants in Case Studies 2, 3 and 4 stated that as graduate students, they brought a different perspective to Faculty committees. Participants in these case studies

also observed that new members joined the AGES committee after attending events, and they also commented that they would tell students in their classes about AGES. Case Study 2 was unique in identifying that "social events are always a good time" and that they wanted to include everyone in AGES. A participant in Case Study 2 stated that she wanted to fit in with the Faculty culture and this was the only group that wrote a grant proposal and a growth plan.

AGES Role

AGES Role was the category created to describe what participants viewed as the role of the association. How did AGES role influence graduate students' interactions with each other? Participants in all case studies identified advocacy, provision of services and solidarity amongst graduate students as AGES role. They also described AGES as building community and being a place for students who wanted to get involved to get involved. Participants in Case Studies 1, 3 and 4 described AGES as a place for other graduate students to share ideas and concerns; it was a venue to get together. A participant in Case Study 2 described AGES as providing a social network, and a similar comment was made by a participant in Case Study 4 who viewed AGES members as creating a network to support one another and provide information.

Coordinator Role

Coordinator Role was the category created to describe the role of the AGES coordinator. How did the AGES coordinator influence graduate students interactions with each other? Participants in all four case studies stated that the AGES coordinator brought people together and invited students to become involved. They also saw the coordinator's role as working to build positive, collegial relationships with faculty members, promoting

AGES, organizing meetings and finding graduate student representatives for Faculty committees. Participants in Case Studies 1, 3, and 4 described the coordinator as a voice for graduate students.

Other Students

Other Students was the category created to describe participants' observations of other graduate students. How did other students influence AGES and each other? Participants in Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 observed that AGES committee members were a point of contact for other students. Participants in Case Studies 1 and 3 described a greater need amongst PhD students, a need that was not being met and participants in Case Studies 1 and 4 talked about international students having different needs. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 stated that there was need amongst other graduate students to connect as well and that AGES provided a sense of belonging after classes ended. Students in these two case studies also expressed concern that graduate students did not know what they needed to do to present at conferences. Participants in Case Studies 3 and 4 stated that feedback from professional development activities was positive.

Faculty participants in Case Studies 1 and 2 observed AGES leafleting faculty mailboxes asking them to make classroom announcements. The participant in Case Study 2 thought graduate students need to connect more with each other. The participant in Case Study 3 predicted that we are moving from an era of part-time students to full-time students, so AGES was important. The participant in Case Study 4 felt there was a strong case for the relevance and excellence of that kind of learning.

Reflecting on his own graduate student experiences, the faculty participant in Case Study 1 mentioned that mentoring was a positive experience. The faculty participant in Case Study 2 commented that there was not a lot of mentoring during her degree. The participant in Case Study 3 observed mentoring among graduate students. Unconditional support and encouragement made the faculty participant in Case Study 1 feel relaxed, comfortable and capable as a graduate student. The faculty member in Case Study 2 said that when s/he was a graduate student, meeting fellow graduate students for coffee to talk about papers, courses, books and speakers was meaningful.

Outcome

Outcome was the category used to describe what was meaningful. How did outcomes influence graduate students' interactions with one another? Faculty Participants in Case Studies 3 and 4 were the only ones to provide outcomes for how AGES influenced other students. The Participant in Case Study 3 observed that "the good part about AGES is that it is graduate students organizing their own learning." AGES ability to articulate is needs will result in greater effectiveness and this will strengthen the learning culture for graduate students in the Faculty.

How do interactions with faculty members influence AGES?

Awareness of AGES

*Awar*eness *of AGES* was the category created to describe the participants' prior knowledge of AGES. How aware of AGES were faculty participants? Faculty participants in all four case studies stated that their own activities with graduate studies increased their awareness of AGES. Participants in Case Studies 2, 3 and 4 had low levels of awareness of AGES prior to 2001, and only the participants from Case Studies 1

and 4 were aware of AGES from its inception. Participants in Case Studies 3 and 4 were aware of AGES organizing programs such as seminars and also of AGES as an informal network for graduate students to get together.

AGES Experience

AGES Experiences describes faculty participants' interactions with AGES. How did faculty's experiences with AGES influence their interactions with the association? Faculty participants in Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 had formed positive impressions of AGES from presenting at events. They described graduate student audiences as focused and keen, stating that it was always a pleasure to interact with them. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 stated that apart from events they did not have a real awareness of AGES however, attendance at events demonstrated how interested students were in some of these issues.

Role of Faculty and Staff

Role of Faculty and Staff describes how participants described faculty members' interactions with AGES. How did faculty support influence AGES? Participants in all four case studies stated that AGES was supported and recognized within the Faculty of Education. Participants noted specific faculty members backing AGES, as well as the need for faculty support. Participants in all groups also stated that as graduate student representatives on Faculty committees felt that their opinion was respected. Participants in Case Studies 2, 3 and 4 felt faculty members were excited about what AGES was doing. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 felt AGES allowed them to meet faculty in a different way. They also observed that when faculty presented research, you could see

where you were going. A participant in Case Study 2 felt that graduate students were not well received in the faculty and staff lounge.

Faculty participants in Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 identified meeting with AGES representatives as part of their role. The participant in Case Study 1 saw the Faculty of Education's role as providing administrative and financial support. The Participant in Case Study 2 identified being a role model and also thought that faculty members should "remind each other of the training and mentoring component that is part of what we do."

Faculty participants in Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 responded to invitations from AGES committee members, presented at events and also corresponded with AGES. The participant in Case Study 1 observed, following the establishment of AGES, that "after a period of time, it became apparent that they needed a forum to talk without faculty there." Participants in Case Studies 1 and 4 stated that they provided administrative assistance and support. Unique to Case Study 3 were observations that graduate students have very uneven access to information, and that faculty members can help build a sense of graduate students as scholars. This faculty member also observed that "I had quite a bit of informal contact via some of the graduate students (who attended an AGES event) who came to me afterwards to ask questions about my own work."

Outcome

Outcome was the category used to describe what was meaningful. How did outcomes influence faculty members' interactions with AGES? The faculty participant in Case Study 4 identified the importance of AGES working together with faculty members, and suggested that AGES has a role in advocating for graduate students in the Faculty of Education. This participate stated that "the whole idea of graduate students and the

culture, environment you build to stimulate intellectual thought and opportunities for graduate students, I think we need through AGES to keep items on the agenda."

Obstacles

Obstacles was the category created to describe impediments for AGES and graduate students. How do obstacles influence graduate student and is there a role for faculty members in creating connections that would reduce obstacles? Participants in all four case studies stated that there are all sorts of things graduate students don't know. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 felt that without an initial connection, AGES events are meaningless. Students may be aware of an event, but without a personal connection they may not identify the event as being for them. Participants in Case Studies 2 and 4 stated that they assumed they would be told things. Participants also stated that family and work commitments prevented students from becoming involved, and AGES needs a physical space in Education. Unique observations included a participant in Case Study 3 observing that the Faculty of Education is not particularly aware of students who are unhappy. A participant in Case Study 4 felt that communication with other graduate students was difficult and another participant stated that "Our job as graduate students is to do research and there is nothing to support that."

Faculty participants in Case Studies 2 and 3 observed graduate students in their programs attend classes and going home. Faculty participants in Case Studies 1 and 3 identified continuity of leadership as an obstacle. Faculty participants in Case Studies 3 and 4 identified a lack of funding and the participant in Case Study 2 identified low visibility. It was also suggested that students studying in cohorts may not need to connect

in the same way. A final observation by this participant was that "a fair amount of work [is] being done by a pretty small group of people.

Chaper 5: Discussion

As the researcher I have in my analysis of the data sought out patterns and perceived larger effects. I was interested in both the *ripple* experiences by participants and the *waves* and *tides* that could be observed in the wider Faculty of Education community.

Curriculum informed my work as the researcher and prior research on student engagement, degree completion, and graduate student experiences informed aspects of the thesis. Throughout this paper I have raised questions which I hope to answer in this discussion.

Leadership Limitations

I returned to Yin (2003) to review the data and to consider its meanings. What stood out strongly across cases as a key finding were the limits of leadership in an organization such as AGES. The short time frame that any leader will remain active hampers a student run organization such as AGES. Most AGES members had already completed a year of study before becoming active on the committee. A masters student often only remained a year or in a few instances two years on the committee, while a doctoral student perhaps remained three years. For each case study, there was either a new leader or a new committee. The process began when a new leader or committee started to form a feeling for the organization. The leader or committee then built a network.

A second key finding was that as AGES became more established, the new leader might also be working with continuing committee members who needed to accept a change in leader and possibly leadership style. A change in leadership resulted in new

initiatives being started, and then just as these initiatives were taking hold, the leader would complete her degree and leave. A third key finding was that for this reason faculty members have an important role to play in the health of a student association, such as AGES. Their role will change over time. For instance, in Case Study 1, the faculty member was the source of information as well as support, providing funding and administrative assistance. In Case Study 2, faculty members extended their support to AGES initiatives and also played an important role in endorsing the organization, helping the group to build credibility. In Case Study 3, a faculty member referred Fionna to the AGES committee. AGES also began a process of moving towards a more collegial relationship with faculty, which was most strongly manifested in Case Study 4. As the relationship changed, faculty members needed to accept the change for the relationship to remain healthy. If AGES goes into a second period of dormancy, it will be a faculty member with a memory of what this current group of student achieved, who will help a new student leader breath life back into the student association.

Bowman (2004) wrote about school teachers as "educational leaders" who "create and sustain a developmental culture for their students and themselves by building a range of relationships" (p. 118). Bowman (2004) cited Ellinor and Gerard (1998) who observed that:

> educational leaders guide their colleagues by engaging in collective conversations, invoking symbolic gestures that reveal relationship, modeling professionalism beyond the label of one's role, championing evocative ideas in both the classroom and the workplace, and being "in influence" as opposed to being "in control" (p. 118).

This study suggests that faculty members, as educational leaders in universities, can fulfill a similar role for graduate students and their associations so that together they can foster the development of a learning community.

Peer Relationships

AGES members reported that they were strongly influenced by relationships with peers. In a study on first year undergraduates (Berger and Milem, 1999) it was noted that "early peer involvement appears to strengthen perceptions of institutional and social support and ultimately persistence." (p. 658). Anna noted in Case Study 2 that students who attended the Faculty Orientation "felt really lucky to have been a part of it and they learned a lot from it. They felt more confident about going to their classes and programs." Anna also noted that she became a point of contact for these students. Peer relationships were also important for AGES committee members. In Case Study 1 the participant reported being motivated to continue her efforts by talking to another graduate student who reinforced that a sense of belonging was a shared need. In later case studies, AGES committee members drew out other students and encouraged their involvement on the committee. That fact that these students later experienced satisfaction from being drawn into AGES resulted in positive feelings for the participant who initiated the connection.

Perceptions of AGES Committee Members About Self

How did AGES committee members, that is the individuals who organized events and activities and sat on committees as graduate representatives, perceive themselves as graduate students within the structure of the Faculty of Education? Being trusted was important to participants, and it also led to participants taking their role seriously. Student in all case studies spoke about being a voice for graduate students in the Faculty of

Education. As early as Case Study 2, AGES was creating awareness amongst faculty members that graduate students were wanting more things to happen in Education to support their learning. Case Studies 1 and 2 were still marked by relatively low visibility within the Faculty. This situation was starting to change by Case Studies 3 and 4, where students had formed an impression of AGES based on a wide range of activities.

A number of participants talked about joining AGES as a low risk activity. AGES afforded participants with an opportunity for self-learning. Participants were also able to gain new skills. In each Case Study, the coordinator's excitement about AGES and the possibilities for the coming year were major motivators for members of the committee. Being open to possibilities also created at atmosphere where possibilities could become realities. Participants spoke in positive terms about how belonging to the committee affected their personal experiences of graduate school. Fina, who said that she felt she had arrived when she became a part of the group, perhaps best summed this up. Participants also described other students as seeing them differently. AGES members were people you could ask if you had a question. Both Anna and Fionna described, in different ways, the importance of this connection: Anna, as the person who was being approached to provide information and Fionna as someone who turned to AGES for support.

Isolation Perpetuates Isolation

An issue that was raised by Booker in Case Study 2 perhaps has broader implications for AGES in terms of the general population. Booker stated that she felt isolated on campus although she was aware of AGES events organized in Case Study 1. Although AGES included events for children and she was looking for activities that were

family oriented, she did not make a connection between the invitation and herself. A personal invitation to join the AGES committee was needed for her to recognize this was a connection that she could make. This left me wondering how many other graduate students in the Faculty of Education may be feeling isolated, but not comfortable or aware enough to approach the group or attend an event? Who will be responsible for extending the invitation? In this study, faculty members as well as AGES members took on this role, but perhaps more could be done to ensure students are not lost by the expectation that *some other person* will extend the invitation?

Developing Collegial Relationships

Faculty members also were perceived differently though their involvement with AGES. Students spoke about feelings of collegiality, of valuing recognition by faculty members, and also seeing faculty members differently after forming a connection through AGES. Wanda and Kate both made significant connections for AGES that resulted in major support from faculty members. One faculty participant said that students approached him about his research following his presentation at an AGES event. Fionna spoke about working with a faculty member on a Social Science and Humanities Research Council initiative and that this was both a meaningful and collegial process.

A repeated theme through the case studies was that being involved leads to greater understanding regarding how the University works. As the group became more established, a broader network formed and AGES became recognized as a credible representative for graduate students. An example would be Three being asked by the GSS to sit on a University committee as a graduate student representative. Another example would be the Research Culture Committee creating a formal position for an AGES

representative on that committee in 2005. This type of recognition followed four years of AGES committee members fostering positive relationships with faculty and consistently delivering quality programs and events.

AGES also provided a connection for graduate students after they completed their courses. As Three said, after her courses were completed, AGES was the only group of people left on campus that she knew. A group that formed to address specific needs was the PhD group. Students reporting having benefited from the PhD group forming, as members of this group were models and mentors for masters students who were active in AGES. The PhD group also identified the need for a transcriber to support graduate student research.

Many participants spoke about recognition by faculty members, but it was not just that their faces were recognized, it was the sense of collegiality this recognition fostered. Fionna describe it this way:

> the committee put me on a first name basis with a lot of the professors that I had been living in the same hallway with for about a year, and yet not had an opportunity to meet. And that was really nice. It was nice to know that there were just professors who knew me and that I knew and I think that that sort of collegial environment, particularly as a graduate student, is really important to establish.

Belonging

Attendance at events increased over the years, as did invitations for AGES to participate in program orientations. Social events were important for participants and other graduate students. As Fina observed, when you have had a career you have been part of an organization's social calendar. When you become a student again, you leave all that behind. AGES' socials provided a connection that some students were looking for on campus.

Feelings of isolation motivated many participants to seek out AGES. Becoming active in AGES fostered a sense of belonging. AGES provided a framework and resources for students to undertake a project or program and successful outcomes led to increased self-esteem. An example would be the effect of AGES on the participant in the first case study. She felt alone and decided to create a connection to the Faculty of Education. Through her involvement with AGES she was "given the opportunity to feel very positive and optimistic and good about myself." Beatrix also felt trusted and that she was someone who could contribute to her Faculty and improve other graduate students' experiences. Other participants expressed similar positive feelings. For instance, Sarah found the power of her own voice and recognized that her experiences of graduate school were important. Student participants also recognized they were a voice for all graduate students in the Faculty.

Increased Self-Esteem

Student participants' perceptions suggest that AGES created a situation for them to take leadership and their successes led in many instances to an increased self-esteem. Hoyle et al, (1999) described "contingent self-esteem" as "positive feelings of self-worth that are dependent upon achieving specific outcomes, meeting expectations, matching standards" (p. 93). Within a graduate program, a student association offers an opportunity for students to self-select activities where they will be able to achieve specific outcomes and meet their own and others expectations.

Related to self-esteem was recognition by other graduate students and faculty members. Helping other students was a particularly strong theme in Case Study 2, but also present in other case studies. Sandra in Case Study 4 was an international student.

She was approached by another AGES member for information to assist an international student. She described the effect on herself.

> I felt like I'd really arrived then, as an AGES member. And I really understood the purpose of it at that point. And it wasn't just because I was helping her, it was because at the same time I was becoming known in the Faculty of Education and also learning so much as well about the University. (Fina)

In Fina's comment, I perceive accomplishment, recognition and satisfaction with a positive outcome. Fina's comment also reflects the interconnectedness of complex systems that make up graduate student life. In January 2004, I wrote in my journal:

> Noel Gough (2003) writes about frames and standpoints (pp. 5–7). This idea of moving the frame excites me! It makes me question my assumptions about the frame that I have created in my work and in my life. How do I pan and edit and what do I include in my frame? What happens when I look to the side of the frame and focus on what is there, rather than what is at the front and in the centre?

By being involved and connected, graduate students were able to "move the frame" of their understanding of university culture.

A Sense of Place

Beatrix described her motivation for becoming involved with AGES as wanting to have a "sense of belonging, wanting to feel rooted within the faculty, in having a place other than just a mailbox on the second floor and that's the end of it." I found this comment both powerful and moving. The mailboxes on the second floor are inside the Faculty's main office. There is no place to sit or meet with other students or faculty members; you collect your mail and leave. Students must also be registered in full-time

study to be eligible for a mailbox; many students in the Faculty do not even have this minor connection to a place in the building. This sense of place was important to the graduate student participants and residual feelings from a loss of place was clearly evident in Booker's interview. "...we had a grad lounge, which was really important to us. Unfortunately, that was transformed into something else and then we were able to use the faculty lounge after a certain point in time." As Booker noted, this was a transitional year and adjustments needed to be made by graduate students, staff, and faculty members. Later, an AGES space was provided through the Learning Commons Committee in the Curriculum Lab.

While many of the student participants spoke of feeling isolated before joining AGES, an exception was Three who developed a strong network of friends and sense of place while she was taking courses. Her AGES connection became important when course work ended and her own research began. "And so this rich sort of culture of friendships that I was working on, based on the people I knew in my classes was wonderful. But now I am in my second year, and I'm actually staying on campus to do my thesis work. They're all gone. But whose still here? People I know in AGES." Three also made connections that led to work as a research assistant and being listed as an author on a published paper.

Belonging to AGES was a significant experience for all the participants in Case Study 2. Booker commented, "that I think (AGES) was the most important part of my graduate experience, so much so that in my own research acknowledgements page...I thanked my great supervisor and ...then there was AGES."

The Ripples, Waves and Tides

Beatrix was very motivated by a desire to have stronger connections between graduate students and faculty members. She created social gatherings as a means to this end. This *ripple* created by Beatrix became a larger ripple or *small wave* in Case Studies 2 as AGES began to mount professional development activities by inviting faculty members to present their research. At this time AGES had a coordinating role, but no real responsibility for the content of presentations. The *wave* became larger in Case Study 3 as graduate students and faculty members became co-presenters. An AGES member worked with a faculty member on a SSHRC initiative. AGES as an association was now a resource faculty could draw upon. The wave grew to a full swell in Case Study 4 with an AGES member organizing a publishing forum. This event was well attended by graduate students, organized by an AGES committee member, supported by other AGES committee members and supported and co-presented with faculty colleagues.

There was also a shift in the *tide* in Case 4, which in some ways was similar to the shift observed by Dr. Pace when AGES was originally founded. The AGES committee was now well established and students wanted a space to talk on their own. Invitations to faculty members were for specific events, rather than general invitations to all AGES activities. Faculty and AGES members would come together for common goals, but AGES also had its own agenda, which involved graduate students taking control of their own experiences. The more intimate connections that formed in Case Studies 1, 2 and 3 when faculty members were invited to share their personal research stories with graduate students was replaced with stronger student-focused connections. While close

connections formed between AGES committee members and faculty in Case Study 4, the connection most often related to a specific project or intitiative.

Ripples Towards Other Graduate Education Students

Regarding other graduate student responses to AGES, Beatrix commented, "the more gatherings I organized, the more that people agreed in that they would also like to meet others." The motivation was knowing that "they were not alone, and they were not the only one having difficulties or struggles as a grad student."

Other graduate students were important to participants in Case Study 2. This group organized a Faculty of Education orientation for new students entering in September 2002. Anna commented, "just from talking to other students that were taking classes with me that had been to the orientation, [they] felt really lucky to have been part of it and they learned a lot from it." The orientation also provided new students with a connection to AGES. Anna noted that students who attended the orientation "felt more confident about going into their classes and program. And they knew they could always come to me and I could find out."

The Ripples That I Created Because of My Campus Connections

AGES changed under my leadership in Case Study 2. Comments made by both graduate student and faculty participants in each of the case studies confirmed that my status as a university employee made a difference. Fina observed "You were at a little bit of an advantage because you could always put your 'I work for the University' hat on…whereas, as a student…your career cloak is taken off you and another one is put on and you're just a student." My interest in a collaborative process also changed the structure of the organizing group. AGES moved from having a president to a coordinator

and I invited other graduate students to join me in organizing events and activities. I was concerned that as a part-time student and a full-time University employee I would not be able to represent full-time students' issues and concerns. If I was the graduate student representative on a Faculty committee I wanted to guided and supported by full-time student colleagues.

AGES became more political in Case Study 2. This group wrote a growth plan and a grant proposal for funding from the Dean's office. Members of the group wanted to fit AGES into the Faculty of Education structure. Booker said, "we wanted to fit in with the culture and the way in which they operated, so we knew we had to have some sort of guiding force…to stay aligned with the Faculty." Fina observed that "one of the things that I did learn a lot was about PR. And politics and it's made me much more savvy in my workplace now than I ever was before."

As a University staff member who had presented similar events, I proposed AGES host Third Thursdays. Anna commented, "I just really like the fact that we were learning from the faculty members and they were also learning from us and there was sharing." These research forums also provided graduate students with a different perspective on research, with informal mentoring beginning to *ripple* as students learned from faculty members and became more confident approaching faculty members who were not their teachers. Anna commented that you "got your head out of your own research for a minute and saw what other people were doing and could learn from that." Dr. Daina noted that following his presentation at a Third Thursday forum students came to talk to him about his research.

Summary

AGES established the following goals in 2002: (a) to provide support systems for graduate education students in their research endeavors, (b) to foster a sense of community and facilitate networking within the Faculty of Education, and (c) to advocate on behalf of graduate education students within the Faculty of Education. (Trofimuk, Corner, Maxwell and Devlin, 2002). The data collected through this multiple case study suggests that AGES has achieved these goals for students who have made a connection through the student association. AGES has primarily served the needs of students who are studying on campus and on a full-time basis. Perhaps as the association grows and becomes an established part of the Faculty outreach programs will be created to reach students who currently come to campus for classes and go home. I wonder if any of these students, like Booker, do not know AGES is for them?

The health of AGES will continue to depend upon the dedication of graduate students who are willing to commit their time, energy and creativity to this initiative. Faculty members will continue to play an important role as advocates and colleagues. In the end, it is faculty members who hold the key to students having a sense of place in Education. By supporting AGES, faculty members create opportunities for students to form a strong learning community.

> The more that graduate students through AGES can articulate what they need and organize for their own learning, the more effective it's going to be. And it can't help but strengthen the…research culture and the learning culture for [all] graduate studies in the Faculty. (Dr. Daina)

The question of how universities will provide student support became central as universities expand their graduate programs to meet the demands of the future. Technology has transformed the delivery of higher education and yet this study clearly

reflected a yearning for personal relationships and face-to-face contact with faculty members and other graduate students amongst participants. Ricks et al (2003) discussed the different graduate cultures that exist in academic areas. A graduate student in a science lab will have a very different experience from a graduate student in humanities. Opportunities for mentorship appear to flow more easily in a laboratory situation. Therefore, this study may be of greater interest to disciplines where such a formal structure is less prevalent. It raises the possibility that students who are supported in creating their own learning opportunities can build community and provide mentorship for one another. For specific recommendations, see Appendix A.

Future Research

Faculty members own graduate student memories were rich. Often the participants' facial expressions would change as they recalled an individual or an incident. In some instances their expression would change from attentiveness to my question to a far off look and a smile. In other instances, there would be a greater intensity to their expression; not all memories were good. Participants also made references to how their own graduate student experiences influenced their practice. Their responses suggested a further area of study that would explore transitions in mentoring. Compton-Hall (2002) noted that "as I interacted with my students and got to know them better, I found it necessary to make adjustments in my mentoring practices in order to meet the students' individual needs." (p. 147) The themes that immerged in that study included "the significance of building relationships, the importance of negotiating meaning to ensure mutual understanding, challenges with giving feedback, the need for understanding and patience when students stress levels are high" (p.147).

While faculty members are often seen as mentors, Miller and Dirkx (1995) explored the idea of graduate student organizations as mentors. Given the strong effect that belonging to the AGES committee had on participants, a further study could explore the mentoring process within the AGES committee.

One of the key findings of this study was the effect of short-term leadership on this student association. A review of the literature produced few articles, suggesting there may be a gap. A study in this area would have broader applications as many communities may potentially deals with the effect of short-term leadership.

Finally, the participants in this study seem to be completing their degrees. This suggests a more in-depth study may be warranted to explore the correlation between graduate student involvement and completion of degree.

Personal Reflections

Taking time for reflection and writing about what I am learning have been the most meaningful parts of this study for me. It has led to a deeper understanding of the complexity that is graduate studies and the richness that comes from working collaboratively and collegially with other graduate students and faculty members. Reflection by participants during the course of the interviews was valuable and the source of much of the depth of this thesis. It is also central to the concept of *currere* with the runner reflecting on what is happening to them as they moved through the curriculum, in this case the experience of AGES.

I considered how involvement by participants created new experiences and opportunities for Fionna, Kate, and Three; what Kate described as *the snowball effect.* In most instances opportunities became apparent when the student took the initiative to

become involved and then shared ideas and interests with others. One connection led to another, then another, and then another.

Reflecting on this study I see that AGES has accomplished some of the goals that were set out in the growth plan during Case Study 2. During the course of this study I have come to the realization that for many part-time students whose focus is their professional role, a connection to campus such as AGES affords is of little interest. I still wonder about the "Bookers" who don't receive a personal invitation and wonder how many of these students missed opportunities to enrich their graduate student life?

The space created for AGES in the Curriculum Lab is small and has no windows. It is not a place that students will be drawn to or will gather. For the Bookers and for AGES members who want and need a connection to achieve a full graduate experience I can only hope that one day a better space will be found. A space that invites people to linger after 4:30pm. A space that asks students to sit and enjoy a cup of coffee while talking about the progress of their research with their colleagues. A space that has research resources, so that students will have a reason to enter the room without an invitation.

As I consider future directions for AGES and I wonder about new AGES committees retaining a connection with past members. As Alumni, these people would provide an amazing resource for future research forums and AGES initiatives. I also wonder about the committee creating a space for shared reflection? Perhaps a gathering of committee members in April when people are leaving? Committee members would write and share their reflections, creating an archive so that some personal memories of

people's experiences remain within the group even after people have left. This idea was supported by an email message I received from Sandra just before I completed the study.

> I think it'll be very interesting if you had an interview with me NOW! I have a better understanding of what AGES does and means to me. It's like 'soil', where seeds are planted, they grow, they bloom into flowers, and they turn into seeds again! The AGES has been the foundation for our academic achievement, our friendship development, and our growth as a person. (Sandra)

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Appendix A: Recommendations

1. Has AGES done what it said it would do? Is it fulfilling its purpose? This research may help to clarify whether any or all of AGES goals have been achieved. Future AGES committees could also consider conducting some form of annual program evaluation.
2. Writing this thesis has been a celebration of all that has been accomplished by a remarkable group of people. I encourage AGES members to continue to celebrate their accomplishments and to create time for shared reflection.
3. Being a graduate student representative for the Graduate Students' Society was meaningful for a number of participants. I will offer to present some of my research findings to the GSS so that they can share this information with their membership. I hope through this initiative that more graduate students will become involved with their students' society.
4. Being a graduate student has changed my professional practice. I have a deeper and more personal understanding the different stages of graduate student life that comes from encountering my own challenges and having other graduate students share their stories with me. This understanding has created stronger orientation and transition programs for graduate students at UVic. I will continue to draw upon research to inform my practice.
5. Many classes do not start until 4:30 p.m., just as administrative offices are closing for the day. I encourage discussion between AGES representatives and faculty members in the Faculty of Education to explore how they can foster a sense of community and a sense of place that extends into the evening and weekend hours.

6. Faculty members played a key role in supporting AGES's success during these case studies. I thank the many faculty members who have participated and made a difference to Education graduate students' academic experiences outside-of-classes. I join Dr. Nia in encouraging all faculty members to remember their "training and mentoring role" by participating in AGES events and supporting graduate student initiatives.
7. Being a graduate student representative on committees was meaningful for the student participants. It also brought a graduate student "voice" to the committees. I encourage the University, faculties and departments to continue to seek out student representation for committees.
8. I recommend that the Faculty of Graduate Studies continue to develop programs that will support all graduate students in the successful pursuit of degrees and consider in program development the role that students associations could play in creating stronger graduate communities.
9. I encourage all graduate students, both full and part-time, to make a connection by attending events, joining student associations or becoming a graduate representative. Student engagement through AGES made a difference and enriched participants' graduate experiences and understanding of graduate school. While many things are already happening on campus, I believe this *ripple* can become a greater *wave* that would enhance all our graduate learning communities at UVic.

Appendix B: Association of Graduate Education Students (AGES) Events and Activities

Table 6

Case Study 1 – Events and Committees

May 2001 to April 2002
Events and Activities
Social events (check old emails from Carmen)
AGES Email Newsletter
AGES Bulletin Board
AGES Website
Committees
Chair Selection Committee
GSS representative (EDCI)

Table 7

Case Study 2 – Events and Committees

May 2002 to April 2003

Events and Committees

Conference list with website addresses Summer 2002

Faculty of Education Orientation September 13, 2002

Third Thursday September 19, 2002
Opening Presentation, Dr. Budd Hall, Dean
Teacher Effectiveness Award Recipient, Dr. Bob Dalton

Third Thursday October 17, 2002

Dr. Kathy Sandford
Dr. Tim Hopper

Third Thursday November 21, 2002

Participatory Research in Schools and Communities, Dr. Ted Riecken
Recurring Research Themes: What Does Student Retention and Distance Education Have in Common? Dr. Patty Beatty-Guenter

Winter Solstice Party December 5, 2002

Third Tuesday January 21, 2003

Inquiring into Inquiring, Dr. Antoinette Oberg
Dr. Lara Lauzon

Third Tuesday February 25, 2003

Healthy Youth in a Healthy Society, Dr. Anne Marshall
Historical Research: Confessions of a Neophyte, Dr. Vern Storey

Third Tuesday March 18, 2003

A Somewhat Nontraditional Approach to Scholarship During a University Career, Dr. Doug Nichols
Arts Based Educational Research: Where are We Today? Dr. Antoinette Oberg and Dr. Roy Graham

Happy End of Term Donut Give-away, April 2003

AGES Bulletin Board, Ongoing

AGES Website – updated, Ongoing

Committees

Graduate Program Advisory

Equity Committee

Building Safety

Faculty Meetings

Teacher Effectiveness

Graduate Student Representatives (EDCI and EPLS)

Education Response to SSHRC Changes

Table 8

Case Study 3 – Events and Committees

May 2003 to April 2004

Events and Activities

Summer Orientation July 3, 2003

AGES Representative
Tracie Smith, Education Librarian

AGES Reggae Barbecue July 22, 2003

Third Thursday September 18, 2003

Accommodating Students with Disabilities:

Some Questions and Issues, Dr. Yvonne Martin Newcombe
What is a text? Bursting the Boundaries of Literacy, Dr. Deborah Begoray

Third Tuesday October 21, 2003

Researching Within First Nations Communities, Dr. Peter Cole
Students' Emotions: More than Test Anxiety, Lia van Winkel, Graduate Student, Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies

Winter Solstice Party December 2, 2003

Faculty of Education Calendar of Events, Edited by AGES January 2004

Third Tuesday, January 20, 2004

Living with Pectus Excavatum, Kendra Massie, Graduate Student, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
Quality of Life of Children with Congenital Heart Disease, Dr. Jillian Roberts

Third Thursday, February 26, 2004

Small Schools and Private Practice, Joe Karmel, Graduate Student
Teacher Wellness: An Interpretive Inquiry, Dr. Lara Lauzon

Third Tuesday, March 16, 2004

On Research Poetry: Exemplars and Challenges in Creating Poetry as Social Science Research, Monica Prendergast
Scaffolding self-regulated learning in the context of a research portfolio: A qualitative analysis of instructor-student dialogue, Dr. Allyson Hadwin and Oonagh Pontin, Graduate Student

AGES April Fools Spring Splash April 1, 2004

AGES Bulletin Board Ongoing

AGES Website – new design and updated Ongoing

Liaison with Research Culture Committee Ongoing

Committees

Graduate Program Advisory

Equity Committee

Building Safety

Faculty Meetings

Teacher Effectiveness

Chair Selection Committee

Table 9

Case Study 4 – Events and Committees

May 2004 to April 2005

Events and Activities	
The Doctoral Student Network	September – weekly
Formally part of AGES as of October 2004	
Pizza Party	July 27, 2004
Creation of AGES listserv	September 2004
Holiday Party, November 24, 2004	
Transition Workshop *Presented by Career Services*	
AGES Bulletin Board	Ongoing
AGES Website – new design and updated,	Ongoing
Donation of Transcriber Equipment by Vern Storey, January 2005	
International and Canadian Student Coffeehouse, January 20, 2005	
How to Publish Workshop	February 4, 2005
presented with Research Culture Committee *Available as DVD*	
Liaison with Research Culture Committee	Ongoing
International and Canadian Student Coffeehouse	March 17, 2005
International and Canadian Student Coffeehouse	April 21, 2005

Committees

Graduate Program Advisory

Building Safety

Elementary Council

Equity Committee

Associate Dean Search

Learning Commons

GSS Grad Council (EDCI and EPLS representatives)

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Ripple effect: perceptions of the impact of a graduate student association on the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Ripple effect: perceptions of the impact of a graduate student association on the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria that is being conducted by Susan Corner. Susan Corner is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at (250) 477-7333 or by email at scorner@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lara Lauzon in the School of Physical Education. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 721-8378.

Graduate programs at the University of Victoria are expanding and this research will contribute to the University's understanding of how creating intersections for graduate students and faculty can contribute to students' graduate experiences.

Ricks et al (2003) identified lack of guidance as a barrier to timely completion for students who completed their survey (49%). While recognizing the important role of the student's supervisor in guiding the research, I wonder how being active in a student association might support or enhance students' experiences of research. While the number of participants in my own study will not be large enough to draw conclusions, it might be interesting to see how AGES members are faring in 3 or 4 years time – did intersecting with AGES affect degree completion?

If the data analysis suggests AGES is beneficial, can similar organizations be established in other areas of the faculty or in other department or universities?

Research of this type is important because it will contribute and build upon the knowledge gained through two recent research projects at the University of Victoria. The first is Research on Critical Aspects of Graduate Education at the University of Victoria: Graduate Student Experiences, Timely Completion, Supervision. (Ricks, F., Kadlec, H., Corner, S., Paul, R., 2003) The second is a thesis, A Shared Journey: Understanding the Experience of Collaborative Learning (Conway, J., 2002.)

This research also supports the University of Victoria's Strategic Plan by seeking to understand the affects of AGES on members of the Faculty of Education. The Strategic Plan includes the objective:

- To provide a learning environment that builds a sense of community possible at university where the majority of students come from outside the local region.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your involvement with AGES. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a

background questionnaire for the purpose of describing the sample as well as individual interview questions and a follow-up group interview.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time inconvenience. Individual and group interviews will be 1 hour. Participants will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire, which will take between 5 and 10 minutes to answer, for the purpose of describing the sample.

Participants will be interviewed once, with the possibility of a follow-up group interview to clarify ideas and for accuracy. Interviews will be audio-taped and field notes will be taken during the interviews. Each participant will have time to review her or his transcripts and delete or change comments deemed to have been made by her or himself.

To minimize the inconvenience to participants, interviews will be conducted in Victoria and Vancouver at a time and location convenient to the participant. If the participant is unable to attend an interview in either location, the demographic survey can be completed by email and the interview can be conducted by telephone. As AGES is a public body your anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

> I ask you to respect other participants by maintaining their confidentiality and anonymity by not discussing what was said during group interviews. By signing a consent form you are indicating you agree to participate according to these terms. You may drop out at any time without consequence.

I am not interested in identifying individuals, but rather in the multiple perspectives that will emerge through the research process. As the researcher, I will be available to discuss matters of concern. You can also discuss any concerns with my supervisor, Dr. Lara Lauzon.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include:

- Gaining more information about how AGES impacts graduate students and the Faculty of Education.
- Gaining an appreciation for the constructions of *others* (for AGES members, other graduate students and faculty; for faculty member, graduate students and AGES members).
- Discovering ideas for actions to be taken in response to what is learned through participation in this research.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, you will be given the option of having your data included in the analysis.

While the researcher has had a coordinating role in AGES, there will not be, nor could there be, any consequence from not participating. Your participation in this study can in no way reflect on your graduate course work or marks.

AGES is a public body and while the research is focused on the multiple perspectives that will emerge through the research process, rather than identifying individuals, anonymity cannot be fully protected. As the researcher, I will seek to protect all the participants of this study as much as I can - by the use of code names and by ensuring that all participants are asked to respect the other participants in the focus group meetings. Participants can ask me to not use portions of their personal interview if they deem data to be too personal or if it would identify them in any way.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by individual participants not being identified in the research. Data will be secured off-site at the researcher's home. Data collected will be destroyed once the thesis is completed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: The research will be disseminated directly to the participants, the graduate supervisor and supervisory committee prior to a thesis presentation. The research may also be presented at a conference, or developed as a workshop or published in an article or published on the Internet through the AGES website.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Graduate Student Participants

1. How long were you on the AGES committee?
2. Can you tell me about your impressions of AGES before you joined the committee?
3. Can you tell me about how you joined the AGES committee?
4. What activities were you involved with as a committee member?
5. Can you think of a significant or meaningful situation with AGES, yes or no? If yes, please describe the situation and what it meant for you.
6. Could you describe a situation where you have observed or been a part of an interaction between an AGES representative and a member or members of faculty? Please describe in as much detail as possible.
7. Could you describe a situation where a graduate student or graduate students who are not a part of the AGES committee have been connected to AGES? Please describe in as much detail as possible.

Interview Questions for Faculty Participants

1. How long have you been aware of AGES?
2. Can you tell me about your impressions of AGES?
3. Could you describe a situation, in as much detail as possible, where you have interacted with AGES?
4. Could you describe, in as much detail as possible, your own graduate student experiences?

Appendix E: Student Demographic Questionnaire

Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Victoria

Ripple effect: perceptions of the impact of a graduate student association on the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria
A MA Research Thesis

Demographic Interview Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box. This questionnaire will provide demographic information for the thesis.

1. Are you:
   - ☐ currently a graduate student
   - ☐ withdrawn from your graduate program
   - ☐ finished your degree

2. What degree are you currently working on or have you recently completed?
   - ☐ Masters of Education
   - ☐ Masters of Arts
   - ☐ Doctorate

3. What is your program area:
   - ☐ Curriculum and Instruction
   - ☐ Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
   - ☐ Physical Education

4. Are you:
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male

5. How old are you?
   - ☐ 20 to 30
   - ☐ 30 to 40
   - ☐ 40 to 50
   - ☐ 50 to 60
   - ☐ 60 to 70

6. Are you someone who normally volunteers in your community?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

7. How long did it take/ will it take to complete your degree?
   - ☐ Less than 2 years
   - ☐ 2 years
   - ☐ 3 years
   - ☐ 4 years
   - ☐ 5 years
   - ☐ 6 years
   - ☐ 7 years

8. Is there any other information you believe would be important for the researcher to know?

_____

_____

Thank you for participating in this research project.

Susan Corner, BFA
MA Candidate
University of Victoria
Faculty of Education, Curriculum and Instruction

Appendix F: Faculty Demographic Questionnaire

Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Victoria

Ripple effect: perceptions of the impact of a graduate student association on the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria
A MA Research Thesis

Demographic Interview Questionnaire for Faculty

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box. This questionnaire will provide demographic information for the thesis.

1. Are you:
   - ☐ a faculty member

2. If you have a graduate degree, what is the highest degree you hold (MA, Med, PhD) and what date was awarded?

   Degree:_____

   Date awarded:_____

3. What is your program area:
   - ☐ Curriculum and Instruction
   - ☐ Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
   - ☐ Physical Education

4. Are you:
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male

5. How have you been associated with AGES
   - ☐ Presented at Third Thursday/Third Tuesday
   - ☐ Asked for AGES input on committee/forum
   - ☐ Provide service for AGES
   - ☐ Participated in an orientation event
   - ☐ Other

6. Is there any other information you believe would be important for the researcher to know?

_____

_____

Thank you for participating in this research project.

Susan Corner, BFA
MA Candidate
University of Victoria
Faculty of Education, Curriculum and Instruction

University of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
University of Victoria
Room A240 University Centre
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Human Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval

Principal Investigator	Department/School	Supervisor
Susan Corner **Graduate Student**	**EDCD**	**Dr. Lara Lauzon**
Co-Investigator(s):		

Project Title: **Ripples, Waves, and Tides: AGES and Graduate Student Engagement at the University of Victoria and Its Perceived Effect on Graduate Students and the Faculty of Education**

Protocol No.	Approval Date	Start Date	End Date
06-396-04b	**15-Mar-06**	**08-Nov-04**	**07-Nov-07**

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

Dr. Richard Keeler
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions or minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of a "Research Status" form.

06-396-04b Corner, Susan