Northern British Columbia Student's Society

Second report:

Survey results on

Graduate computer laboratory

Sep. 2024

Introduction

The graduate student computer laboratory, currently under the management of NBCGSS, has great potential for various student activities like assigned desks, hot desks with or without lockers, and meeting or study rooms. Despite fresh management ideas, efforts to return control of the space to UNBC have hindered full utilization, leaving it underused.

To assess the current state, NBCGSS surveyed 70 students, each spending an average of 18 minutes and 48 seconds, totaling around 22 hours. The survey, designed by the NBCGSS board, covered awareness, usage, importance for coursework and research, activities, equipment, preferences for dedicated spaces, opinions on bookable desks, and the likelihood of using the lab if promoted and updated. Open-ended questions gathered additional feedback and suggestions.

This survey was designed by the NBCGSS board of directors to gather feedback on the graduate student computer lab. The survey questions covered the following main areas:
  - Awareness of the existence of the graduate computer lab
  - Current and potential usage of the lab
  - Importance of the lab for coursework and research
  - Types of activities and equipment used in the lab
  - Preferences for dedicated graduate student spaces on campus
  - Opinions on the idea of bookable desks in the lab
  - Likelihood of using the lab if it is promoted and updated
The survey also included open-ended questions for participants to share personal experiences, stories, and additional comments or suggestions regarding the graduate computer lab space.

Method and questions
The main questions of survey has been set after two meetings of NBCGSS board of directors based on integrated ideas of directors. These questions were:

1. What is your graduate program at UNBC?
2. Were you aware of the Graduate Computer Lab under the supervision of NBCGSS in building 10?
  o Yes
  o No

3. Select the options best suits you and describes your situation regarding the Graduate Computer Lab?

  o I did know about the space - and am/will use the space in that capacity.
  o I did know about the space - but did not see the need to use the space in that capacity.
  o I did NOT know about the space - and would be interested in using the space as presented.
  o I did NOT know about the space - and will be NOT interested to use the space as presented
  o I am busy/not interested in spaces within UNBC campus

4. How often do you currently use or plan to use the Graduate Computer Lab, now that you are aware of this space?

- o Daily
- o Weekly
- o Monthly
- o Seasonal
- o Yearly
- o Never

5. If you use the space, how important is the Graduate Computer Lab for your coursework and research?

- o Extremely important
- o Somewhat important
- o Neutral
- o Somewhat not important
- o Extremely not important
- o Not applicable

6. If you use the space, what types of activities do you primarily use the Graduate Computer Lab for?
- o Study
- o Meetings
- o Work with your own laptop
- o Work with the computers in lab
- o Printing or scanning
- o Not applicable

7. If you use the space, what specific features or equipment in the lab do you find most valuable?

- o Computers
- o Just monitors (To connect with your laptop)
- o Printer/scanner
- o Shredder
- o Tables
- o Not applicable (Not sure what equipments are available.)

8. How important do you think it is for graduate students to have a dedicated space on campus, other than the Graduate Lounge?

- o Extremely important
- o Somewhat important
- o Neutral
- o Somewhat not important
- o Extremely not important

9.In your opinion, what kind of space would be most valuable to you as a graduate student at UNBC? (Assigned Desks, Hot Desks, Bookable meeting room, etc)

10.If the Graduate Computer lab is transformed for other purposes and removed from NBCGSS's services, would the removal of the lab affect your studies and research? If so, please explain.

11.Bookable desks for Students:
There are not enough offices that can cover all students. As an alternative solution, we are considering bookable desks at the Graduate Computer Lab, which grads can book the desk, for a short period of time. We could potentially provide a personal storage closet for the student's materials and belongings.
(Optional: Click on this link for more explanation, about this idea by our Director at Large Alireza Noory https://shorturl.at/Mx9fj)
Please select the statement that best reflects your opinion on this idea:

- The desks can be good alternative for offices
- Bookable desks sound like a decent temporary solution, but I would prefer having a designated office space if possible.
- Providing personal desks to waitlisted students is not a good idea.
- I would not use bookable desks and instead prefer to work from home or other locations on campus.
- I already have a designated office space, so bookable desks are not something I need.
- Other (Feel free to share any concerns or comments in the last question in this survey.)

12.As a grad student, do you feel the need for an assigned desk (Office space) for your work/school? (That desk would be assigned to you for one semester.)

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- Not applicable (i.e. Im not at UNBC campus, etc)

13.How likely are you to use the Graduate Computer Lab if it is promoted more effectively and its resources are updated?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

14.If applicable, please share any personal experiences or stories about how the Graduate Computer Lab has positively impacted your academic journey.

15.Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the Graduate Computer Lab space? This is your opportunity to share your thoughts on the future of this space and its importance to graduate students at UNBC.

Answers and analysis

1. **What is your graduate program at UNBC?**

Based on the survey responses, the majority of participants were Master of Science students. To summarize the key themes and sentiments from the survey, the following word cloud was generated:

In this report, for the open answer questions, the word cloud has been used to provide a visual representation of the main ideas and concerns expressed by the graduate students in the survey. The size of the words corresponds to their frequency, allowing us to quickly identify the most common and important topics that emerged from the survey data.

2. Were you aware of the Graduate Computer Lab under the supervision of NBCGSS in building 10?

According to the survey results, 60% of the participating students were unaware of the existence of the graduate computer lab (see graph below).

This suggests a potential weakness in effectively communicating information about this dedicated space to the graduate student population.

The high percentage of students who were previously unaware of the lab indicates an opportunity to improve outreach and promotion efforts.

3.Select the options best suits you and describes your situation regarding the Graduate Computer Lab?

The highest share of the students (38%) mentioned, after awareness about this space, they will use it. Thus, alongside the 15% of the student population that was aware of the computer lab, it is expected that increased awareness of the lab, coupled with enhancements to the space and its resources, could lead to a noticeable increase in the overall utilization of the graduate computer lab by students. In other words, addressing the awareness gap and making the lab's availability and amenities more visible to the graduate community could drive greater engagement and usage of the facility.

● I did know about the space - and am/will use the space in that capacity (11).
● I did know about the space - but did not see the need to use the space in that capacity (22).
● I did NOT know about the space - and would be interested in using the space as presented (27).
● I did NOT know about the space - and will be NOT interested to use the space as presented (12).
● I am busy/not interested in spaces within UNBC campus (2).

4.How often do you currently use or plan to use the Graduate Computer Lab, now that you are aware of this space?

● Daily   3
● Weekly   18
● Monthly   11
● Seasonal   13
● Yearly   3
● Never   22
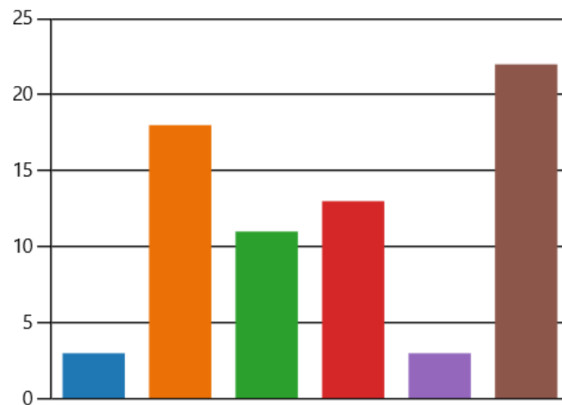
The results showed that 64.28 % of students will use this space at least seasonally now they are aware of this space.

5.If you use the space, how important is the Graduate Computer Lab for your coursework and research?

🔵	Extremely important	10
🟠	Somewhat important	16
🟢	Neutral	11
🔴	Somewhat not important	7
🟣	Extremely not important	7
🟤	Not applicable	19
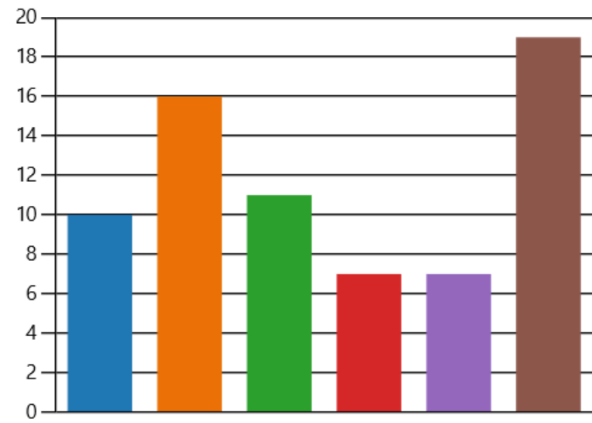
6.If you use the space, what types of activities do you primarily use the Graduate Computer Lab for?
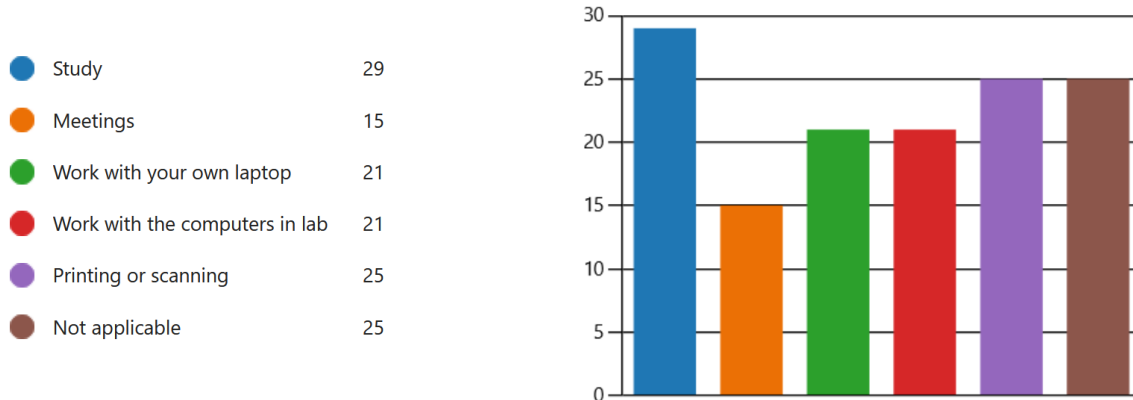
Survey Highlights: Graduate Computer Lab Usage
Out of 70 graduate students surveyed:
- 29 plan to use the lab for studying
- 15 intend to use it for meetings
- 42 aim to use the lab's computers for academic and research work

To meet these diverse needs, the graduate computer lab should offer:
1. High-quality tables and comfortable seating for studying
2. Video conferencing capabilities and meeting spaces
3. Sufficient computers and monitors to support 42 students

Question 7 of the survey further confirms the demand for these resources, emphasizing the importance of equipping the lab appropriately to serve the graduate student community effectively.

7.If you use the space, what specific features or equipment in the lab do you find most valuable?
The answers to this question of survey reveal specific hardware needs among the graduate students more clearly. 26 students mentioned that they would like to have access to dedicated computers within the lab, while 21 students expressed a need to connect their own laptops and simply asked for monitors to facilitate their work.
In addition to computer and display needs, the survey data indicates that the printer and scanner capabilities within the graduate computer lab are highly valued. Additionally, the survey data shows that printer and scanner capabilities are highly used and valued, with 37 students specifically mentioning on-site printing and scanning resources as the most valuable, despite other options being available around campus. Fortunately, many of the necessary elements identified through the survey responses are already available in the current graduate lab. Therefore, significant new purchases may not be required. Instead, the focus can be on optimizing the configuration and accessibility of the existing equipment and resources to serve the diverse needs expressed by the surveyed students. This strategic approach can help ensure the lab is well-equipped to support the usage patterns documented in the survey data.

● Computers	26
● Just monitors (To connect with y...	21
● Printer/scanner	37
● Shredder	13
● Tables	26
● Not applicable (Not sure what e...	24
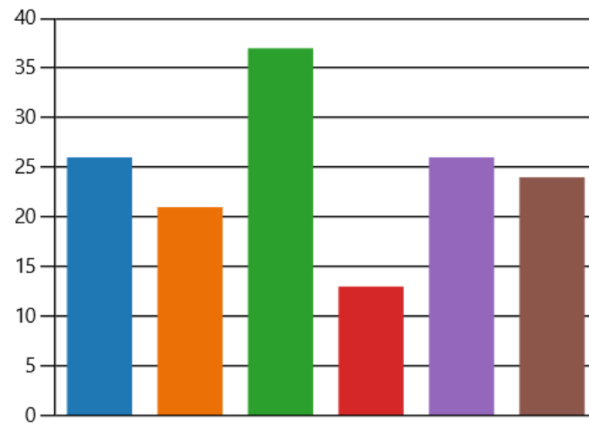
8.How important do you think it is for graduate students to have a dedicated space on campus, other than the Graduate Lounge?

|	
● Extremely important	40
● Somewhat important	24
● Neutral	3
● Somewhat not important	1
● Extremely not important	2

One of the key questions addressed in the survey was whether there is a need for any additional spaces beyond the dedicated graduate lounge. This question was aimed at understanding the importance students place on having access to this specialized lab space.

The survey results indicate that 91.4% of respondents, or 64 out of the 70 students surveyed, believe it is either extremely important or somewhat important to have this dedicated graduate computer lab space. This overwhelming majority underscores the crucial nature of providing this resource to the graduate student population.

Given the strong sentiment expressed by 91.4% of students that the graduate computer lab is an important and necessary space, it is clear that this dedicated facility should be maintained alongside other common graduate student spaces, such as lounges. The survey findings emphasize the value graduate students place on having access to this hub, in addition to their other collaborative and social areas on campus.

9.In your opinion, what kind of space would be most valuable to you as a graduate student at UNBC? (Assigned Desks, Hot Desks, Bookable meeting room, etc)
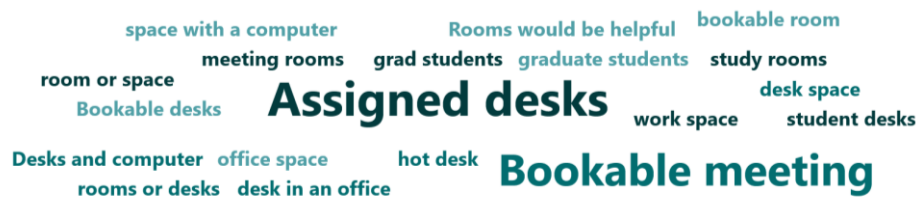
The graduate student population has expressed a strong and well-articulated need for a flexible research studio that can serve multiple programmatic purposes. They envision a versatile space that can be adapted to accommodate diverse uses, such as a dedicated room for thesis or dissertation defense meetings, or a collaborative area conducive to group discussions and collective academic activities. The proposed studio should include one or two computer workstations and several communal desks, ideally situated in close proximity to the library to enhance accessibility. Additionally, the inclusion of a dedicated space for printing and scanning documents is also identified as a crucial requirement, highlighting the need for integrated facilities that support both individual and group-based academic endeavors.

The importance of assigned desks for the purpose of focused research is a recurring thematic emphasis within the student feedback. Many students feel that having a designated, personal workspace is essential for maintaining productivity and organizational efficiency. They emphasize that assigned desks provide a stable environment where students can leave their materials and return to a familiar setting each day. This dedicated space is seen as more beneficial than temporary "hot desks" or bookable meeting rooms, which may not offer the same level of continuity and personal comfort required for long-term projects and sustained scholarly activities.

Students also highlight the need for improved bookable meeting rooms. Currently, there appears to be a lack of dedicated spaces where students can hold meetings, conduct virtual Zoom calls, or collaborate on group projects without disrupting others. They suggest that these rooms should be equipped with modern amenities like projectors, whiteboards, and high-quality furniture. Some students also propose that these rooms be made available on a more flexible basis, accommodating various time slots to suit the diverse schedules of graduate students. Enhanced visibility and standardization of these specialized spaces are also recommended to ensure that all students can access them as needed, thereby promoting collaborative practices and facilitating academic discourse.

Based on shared ideas and above-mentioned points, 10 extracted main points of all answers:

1. A graduate research studio that can be flexible and serve multiple purposes like a meeting room or dissertation defense space, with computer workstations and grad student desks.
2. A space to print and scan documents for graduate students.
3. A space for group discussions related to academic projects.
4. The need for an assigned desk for focused research.
5. The desire for a bookable meeting room with good equipment like a projector, whiteboard, monitors, chairs, and desks.
6. The need for assigned desks, either in an office or with a computer and common printer.
7. The desire for bookable meeting rooms and co-working spaces for graduate students.
8. The need for standardization and increased care of graduate student office spaces.
9. The value of having designated office spaces shared with lab mates, as well as a quiet/silent work area and bookable meeting rooms.
10. The importance of having a personal, dedicated desk space for graduate students to focus on long-term projects.

10. If the Graduate Computer lab is transformed for other purposes and removed from NBCGSS's services, would the removal of the lab affect your studies and research? If so, please explain.

access printers

space for students

Computer lab   grad students   studies and research   work space

graduate space   GIS lab   studies space working   computer space

office space

affect graduate students   use   alternative spaces

computer that I would use   removal of the lab   important to have space

The removal of the Graduate Computer Lab at UNBC would have a significant impact on many graduate students who do not have access to a designated workspace. As one participant noted, "For graduate students who do not have access to a designated lab, UNBC should contemplate providing alternative spaces." Having a dedicated space with 24/7 access to computers, printers, and scanners is essential for graduate students who often work outside of regular office hours, including evenings and weekends. The lack of such a space could hinder their ability to complete their theses and research projects effectively.

Moreover, the Graduate Computer Lab serves as an important hub for collaboration and peer learning among graduate students. As one respondent stated, "The removal of the lab will affect my studies because this lab offers a space for graduate students to work together on projects, share ideas, and support each other. Its removal could reduce opportunities for collaboration and peer learning, without the lab this will be difficult." The loss of this centralized space could negatively impact the academic and professional development of graduate students, who rely on such spaces to engage with their peers and foster a sense of community.

On the other hand, for those graduate students who have access to assigned office spaces or alternative computer labs, the removal of the Graduate Computer Lab may not have a direct impact on their studies and research. As one participant mentioned, "It's important to know that I have an assigned office, so I don't use the lab because of this (I would use it if I didn't have that assigned space), therefore the removal of this space doesn't affect me." However, these individuals still recognize the importance of maintaining such spaces for their peers who may not have the same level of access to dedicated workspaces.

Based on above mentioned points and results of survey, here are the 10 main points extracted from the text:
1. The removal of the Graduate Computer Lab does not personally affect some students who have access to other labs or their own computers. However, it would impact graduate students who don't have access to a designated work space.
2. Having access to a scanner and printer available 24/7 is beneficial for graduate students who often work outside regular office hours.
3. Some students are unaware of the lab's existence or how to access it, and would continue to use the library for their studies.
4. The lab would be very helpful for graduate students who don't have a dedicated office space to work on assignments, meet with classmates, and access printers/scanners.

5. The lab is an important space for graduate students to study, hold meetings, and collaborate on projects. Its removal could reduce opportunities for peer learning and collaboration.

6. The lab provides a quiet, focused space for thesis-based research, which is important for graduate students who prefer working on campus.

7. Some students with assigned offices don't use the lab, but they acknowledge its value for those who don't have dedicated workspaces.

8. The lab's removal would not impact all graduate students, especially those who have their own laptops and access to other computer labs on campus.

9. Maintaining the Graduate Computer Lab is seen as important by many graduate students, who view it as a valuable resource for their studies and research.

10. Providing alternative spaces or dedicated offices with computers for graduate students would be a better solution than removing the lab completely. 11.Bookable desks for Students

- The desks can be good alternative for offices (18).
- Bookable desks sound like a decent temporary solution, but I would prefer having a designated office space if possible (31).
- Providing personal desks to waitlisted students is not a good idea (9).
- I would not use bookable desks and instead prefer to work from home or other locations on campus (15).
- I already have a designated office space, so bookable desks are not something I need (23).
- Other (Feel free to share any concerns or comments in the last question in this survey), (6).
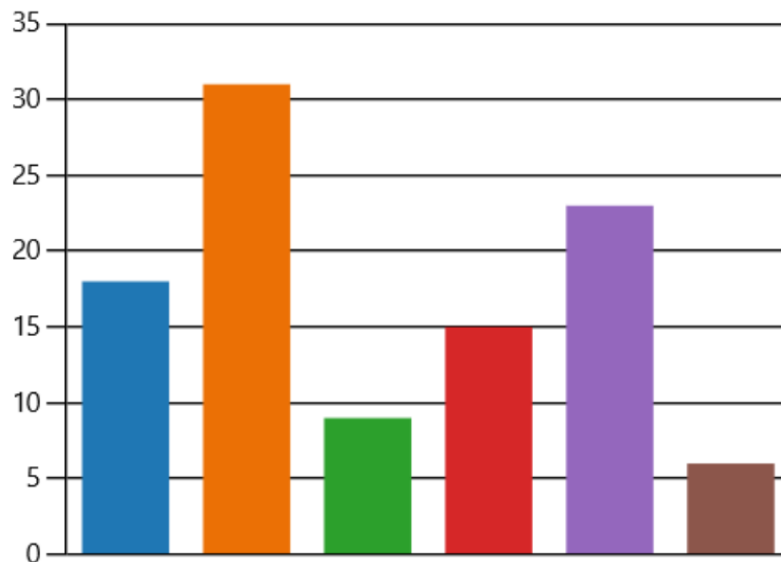
The results show that 23 of the respondents currently have access to dedicated spaces, while 47 students do not.In addition to understanding the current state of dedicated spaces, the survey also explored students' perspectives on potential alternatives. 49 students, representing 70% of the total

respondents, believe that bookable desks could serve as a good short-term or long-term alternative to individual student offices.

This data suggests that while nearly one-third of the graduate students surveyed already have access to designated spaces, the majority do not. However, the openness expressed by 70% of respondents to the idea of bookable desks as a viable alternative indicates a willingness to consider flexible solutions to address the need for dedicated graduate student spaces on campus.

12. As a grad student, do you feel the need for an assigned desk (Office space) for your work/school? (That desk would be assigned to you for one semester.)

Also, 57.14% of the students surely need assigned desks for their work/school.

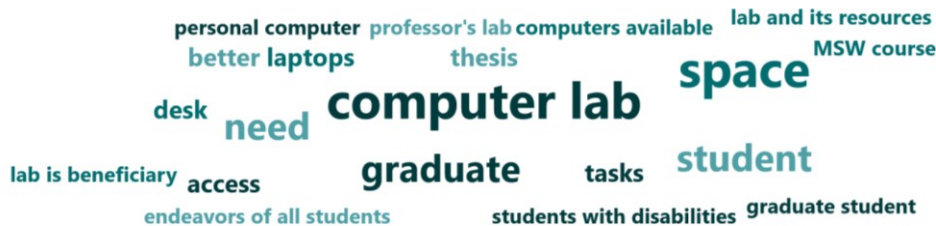|	
Yes	40
No	16
Not Sure	6
Not applicable (i.e. Im not at UN...	8

13. How likely are you to use the Graduate Computer Lab if it is promoted more effectively and its resources are updated?

Out of 70 students, 71.42% mentioned that, with modification and update of the computer lab, they will use this space (Very likely or Somewhat likely).

Very likely	23
Somewhat likely	27
Neither likely nor unlikely	5
Somewhat unlikely	7
Very unlikely	8

14. If applicable, please share any personal experiences or stories about how the Graduate Computer Lab has positively impacted your academic journey.

Based on the students answers to this question, many students seem to be unaware of the existence of the Graduate Computer Lab or have never used it before. Some students, like the one who learned about it near their graduation, expressed frustration at finding out about it so late in their academic journey. This suggests that the NBCGSS/university may not be effectively communicating the availability and purpose of this resource to the graduate student population.

For those students who are aware of and have used the Graduate Computer Lab, their experiences seem to be mixed. Some find the lab to be a useful meeting space and appreciate the opportunity to have access to a computer without having to carry their laptops around campus, especially for those who take public transportation. However, others find the lab to be inaccessible, with the need to request access making it seem similar to the graduate lounge, which has limited resources.

Additionally, the text highlights the experiences of students with disabilities, who find the Graduate Computer Lab to be more accommodating and ergonomic than working from home. This suggests that the lab is providing an important resource for students with specific needs. However, the text also indicates that the overall setup of the lab, with too many computers and a lack of bookable desks, could be improved to better serve the diverse needs of the graduate student population.

15. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the Graduate Computer Lab space? This is your opportunity to share your thoughts on the future of this space and its importance to graduate students at UNBC.
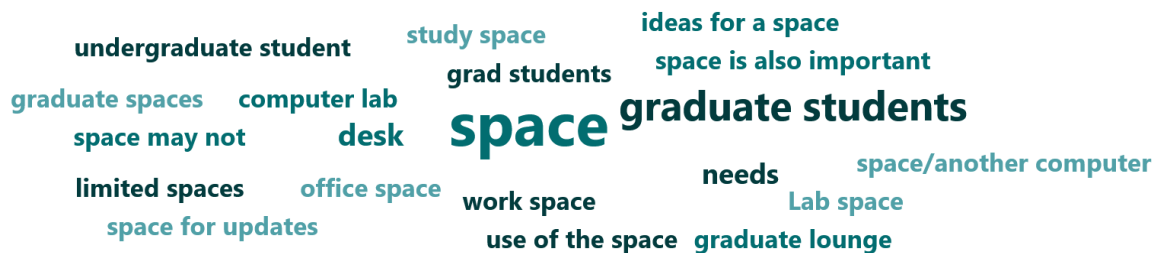
The graduate student population has provided a range of constructive suggestions and expressed concerns regarding the Graduate Computer Lab space. These inputs reflect a substantive desire for enhanced functionality and accessibility of the facilities. A recurrent thematic focus is the imperative for **better-equipped and modernized resources**. Students have highlighted that the current state of the lab, characterized by outdated equipment and a **lack of essential tools such as projectors and whiteboards, diminishes its utility and efficacy.** They propose transforming the space into a more technologically advanced environment, integrating updated resources such as docking stations with dual monitors, accessible printers, and high-quality scanners. This upgrade would cater not only to individual research needs but also facilitate professional presentations and collaborative group work, rendering the space a more versatile and multifunctional resource.

Another pivotal concern is the accessibility and availability of the lab. **The concept of a 24-hour drop-in space** is appealing to many graduate students, suggesting that a more flexible access model could significantly benefit those with irregular schedules. Additionally, there is a call for **dedicated office spaces** rather than temporary desk bookings. Students emphasize that having a permanent, assigned desk or office would better support their academic work by providing a stable and private environment conducive to research and study. This stability is particularly crucial for fostering collaboration and the exchange of ideas among students working on similar projects.

Furthermore, the perceived **lack of awareness and effective promotion** of available graduate spaces is a notable issue. Many students are reportedly unaware of the existing resources or how to access them, indicating a need for enhanced communication and visibility. Strengthening the visibility of the Graduate Computer Lab and the Graduate Lounge through orientation programs and clear signage could address this gap. There is also a suggestion to improve the lab's physical environment by making it more inviting with **better décor and organization**, which could positively impact students' motivation and willingness to utilize the space.

Lastly, concerns about the current condition of the lab—described as dirty and poorly maintained—underscore the importance of **regular upkeep and maintenance**. One student have also expressed unease about the safety of the space [for women of color]. Ensuring a clean, safe, and well-maintained environment, alongside a system for reassigning unused desks to those in need, will help create a more supportive and effective workspace for all graduate students.

Conclusion

The survey results provide valuable insights into the current state and future potential of the graduate student computer laboratory controlled by the Northern British Columbia Graduate Students Society (NBCGSS). Despite the ongoing challenges in returning the space to UNBC control, the new NBCGSS management team has brought fresh ideas for optimizing the utilization of this important facility.

One of the key findings is the significant lack of awareness among graduate students about the existence of the computer lab. Over 60% of the survey participants were unaware of this dedicated space prior to the survey. This suggests an opportunity to improve outreach and promotion efforts to ensure the graduate student population is informed about the availability and amenities of the lab.

The survey also revealed strong demand and perceived importance for the computer lab among those who were aware of it.

An overwhelming 91.4% of respondents believe the lab is either extremely or somewhat important, underscoring its crucial role in supporting graduate student needs. The intended uses of the lab span studying, meetings, and computer-based academic and research work, highlighting the diverse needs this space can fulfill.

The survey also highlights the importance of maintaining and improving the Graduate Computer Lab to better serve students. After awareness about this space, many students, particularly those without other dedicated workspaces, rely on the lab for collaboration, research, and access to essential resources like computers or at least monitors. For the students who planned to use this space, the removal of the lab could adversely affect students' academic progress and peer interactions. Suggestions for improvement include enhancing communication about the lab's availability, updating its facilities, and ensuring it is clean and well-maintained. The feedbacks also suggests considering alternatives like bookable desks for flexibility and ensuring that all graduate students have access to appropriate workspaces.

To cater to these varied requirements, the lab should be equipped with the appropriate resources, including workstations, meeting spaces, and printing/scanning capabilities. Fortunately, many of the necessary elements are already present, suggesting the focus can be on optimizing the configuration and accessibility of the existing equipment rather than significant new investments. Overall, the survey results demonstrate the graduate students' strong desire for a dedicated and well-equipped computer lab space. By addressing the awareness gap, enhancing the resources, and promoting the lab's availability, the NBCGSS can unlock the full potential of this valuable facility and better support the academic and research needs of the graduate student community.

Proposed Action Items:

1. **Lab Control and Space Optimization**
   • NBCGSS, being most closely engaged with student needs, is best positioned to address the diverse requirements of the graduate body.
   • With the upcoming responsibility of handling Graduate Student-Led Organizations (SLOs or clubs) in partnership with NUGSS, we urgently need a space to offer our students for social, career, and academic meetings/events and potentially more.
   • Therefore, NBCGSS should maintain control of the computer lab to effectively serve graduate students' diverse needs.

2. **NBCGSS Action Items**
   • Assign research office spaces for specific time periods (e.g., 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM) to students in need.
   • Implement an online booking system for work, academic, and Student-Led Organization (SLO) meetings and presentations after 4:30 PM.
   • Allocate budget for a projector and equipment updates, while seeking financial assistance from UNBC departments, given their shared responsibility for this space.

3. **Optimize Existing Resources**
   • Reconfigure monitor setups to facilitate laptop connections for extended screen usage.
   • Maintain or assign dedicated research computers for assigned spaces and hot-desking needs.
   • Install at least one accessibility-friendly computer for students with special needs, in collaboration with the UNBC Accessibility Committee.
   • Upon confirmation of NBCGSS's control, consult with UNBC Accessibility Services for guidance on necessary materials.
   • Ensure all existing equipment is fully functional and up-to-date.

4. **Enhance Awareness**
   • NBCGSS commits to improving promotion of this space.
   • Collaborate with UNBC departments to enhance the lab's attractiveness, aiming to replicate the success of the engineering lab and lounge, which sees high usage due to quality equipment and an appealing atmosphere.

5. **Maintain and Upgrade Facilities**:
   • Partner with IT services to ensure printers and scanners are well-maintained and readily accessible.

6. **Continuous Improvement**
   • Implement a system for ongoing user feedback and conduct regular surveys to stay updated on evolving student needs.

Support Needed:

To implement these action items effectively, we request:

1. Administrative support to improve lab accessibility and awareness.
2. Technical support from the UNBC IT department to optimize and maintain equipment.
3. Funding for necessary upgrades and reconfigurations from UNBC departments (e.g., UNBC Accessibility Committee, Research-focused departments).

By focusing on these action items, we aim to maximize the utility of the Graduate Computer Lab, ensuring it meets the diverse needs of our graduate student population and supports their academic success. Please hear our needs and trust our leadership but please note that without your support we are not able to reach our goals and support our UNBC graduate students the way they deserve.