



GSS
UBC VANCOUVER

THE GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

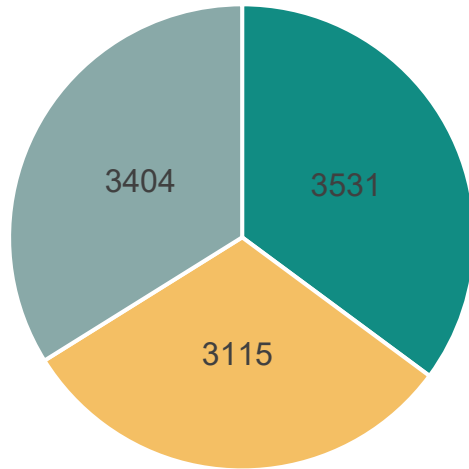
Graduate Student Society UBC Vancouver

December 2019



Who are Graduate Students?

Graduate Students at a Glance



■ PhD ■ Research Masters ■ Professional Masters

What do they do?

Course Based Masters (< 1.5 years)

Courses towards completion. Typically higher tuition (e.g. MBA)

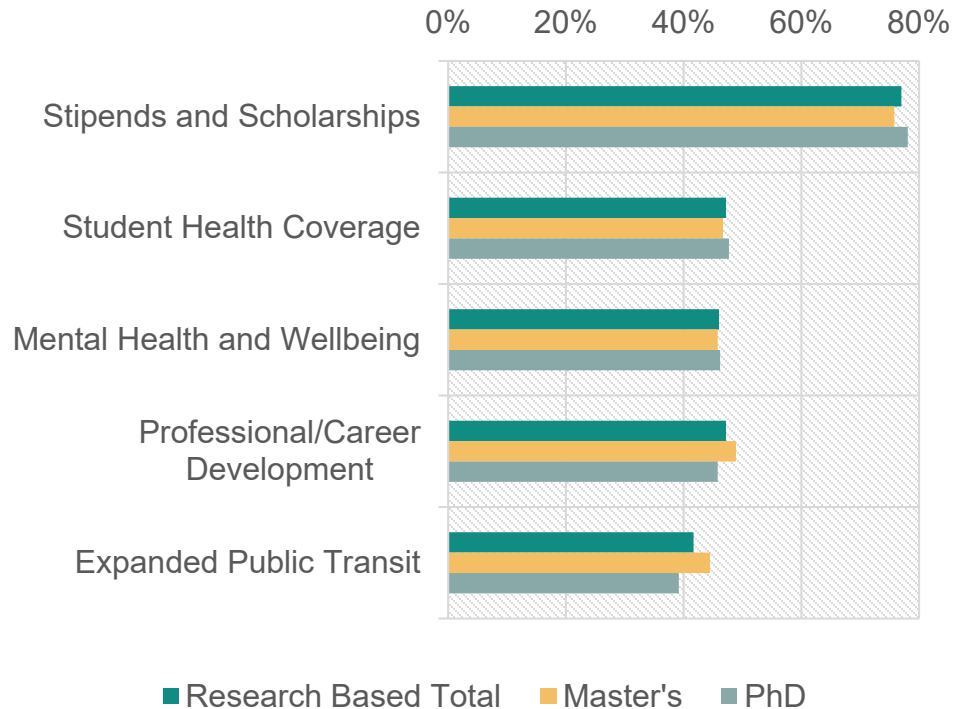
Research Masters (2-3 years)

Limited courses (~18 credits). Research + Thesis

PhD (5-7 years)

Fundamentally research.

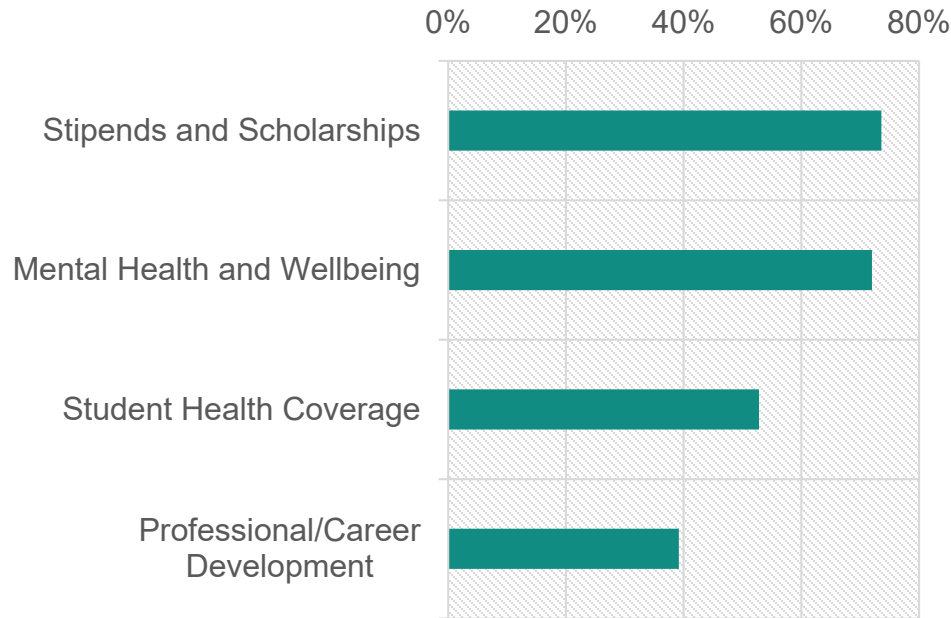
Context – Advocacy Priorities



78% of graduate students in the research stream select funding advocacy as a priority for the GSS.

Source: Graduate Student Society Student Satisfaction Survey (GSS-SSS) 2019.

Context – Advocacy Priorities

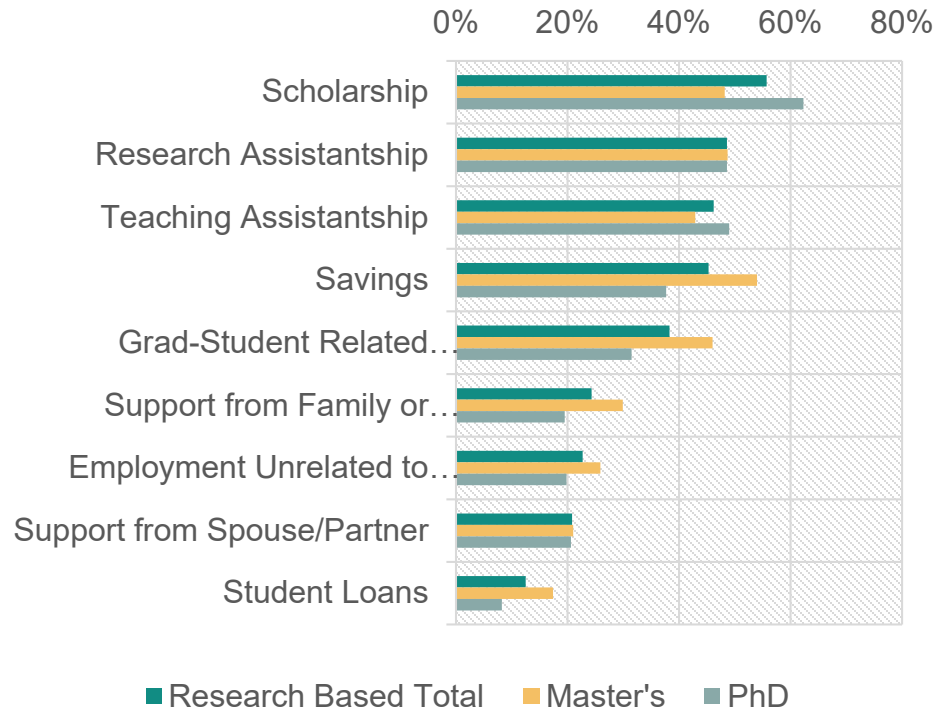


Students Who Self Identify as having a Mental Health Disorder

- Even amongst students who self identify as having a mental health disorder, stipends is still the top requested advocacy issue, even on top of mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- This may indicate that funding is a major stressor for students struggling with mental health.

Source: Graduate Student Society Student Satisfaction Survey (GSS-SSS) 2019.

Context – Income Sources



- 71% of Graduate Students in the research stream rely on sources of income unrelated to their graduate studies (e.g. outside employment, savings, family support, spousal support)
- This number is 79.6% for research Master's and 63.6% for PhD.
- The requirement for external funding is a financial barrier that creates a major inequity in access to graduate school.

Stipends for graduate students in the research stream do not increase yearly, despite increases in tuition, housing and cost of living.

Observation 1



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Example Case - Yearly

Stipend: PhD average, as reported in the GSS-SSS.

Awards: Based on an APSC PhD, actuals. ASPC Grad award not paid after year 4.

Tuition: Based on UBC data, project to increase at 2%/year.

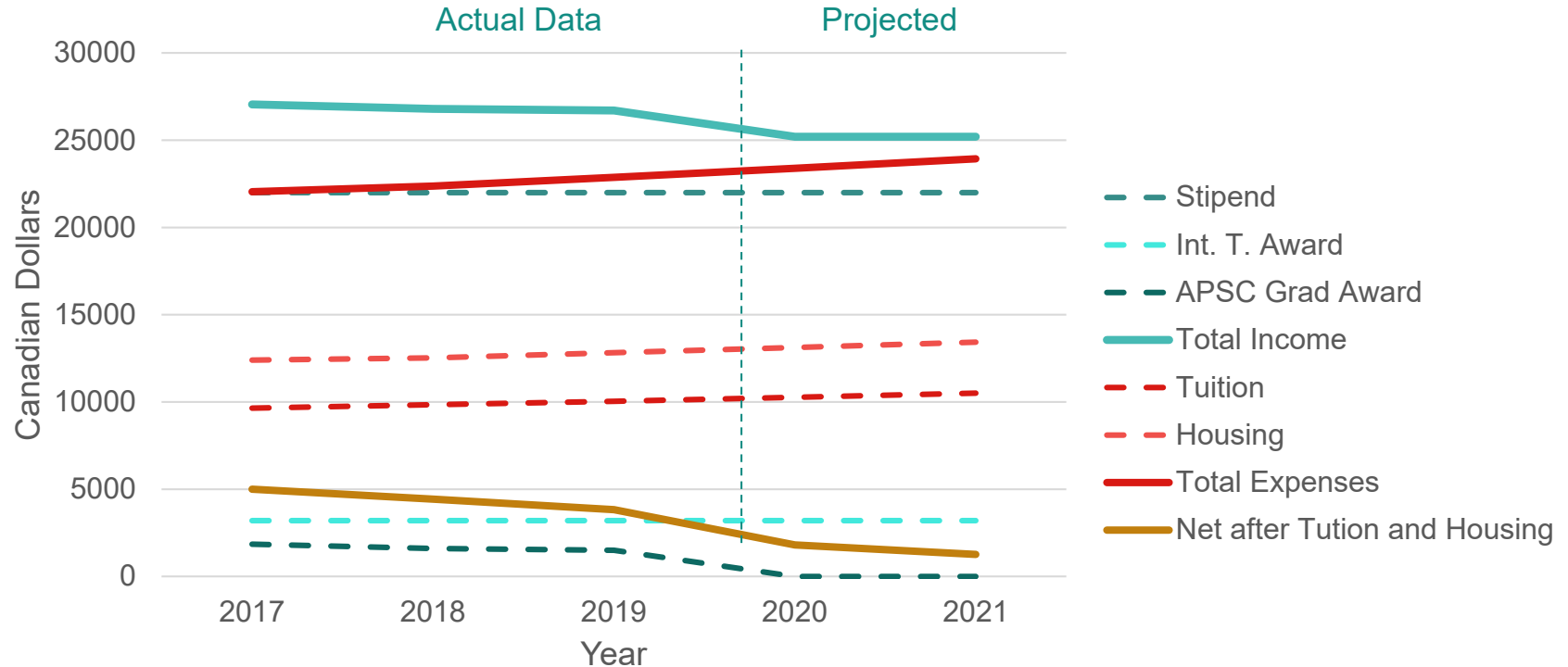
Housing: Thunderbird smallest studio (cheapest single occupancy student housing). Based on actuals, projected to increase 2.3%/year.

(First year excluded)

Year	Stipend	Int. T. Award	APSC Grad Award	Total Income	Tuition	Housing	Total Expenses	Net
2017	22000	3200	1850	27050	9651	12396	22047	5002
2018	22000	3200	1600	26800	9839	12528	22367	4432
2019	22000	3200	1500	26700	10039	12828	22867	3832
2020	22000	3200	0	25200	10270	13123	23393	3206
2021	22000	3200	0	25200	10506	13424	23931	1268



Example Case - Yearly



In some departments, Teaching Assistant (TA) compensation is counted towards the stipend provided, making it more difficult for students to supplement their income.

This also negates the yearly adjustment of TA hourly wages.

Observation 2



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Stipend and TA

There are two realities at UBC, depending on the department:

- 1) Research assistantships (RA) are paid separately from any teaching assistantships (TA).
- 2) The department offers a lump sum compensation that includes TA and RA.

In case 2, the increase of TA hourly wage is absorbed by the department by decreasing the RA amount. Similarly, if the student works more hours as a TA, this is also discounted from the RA.

In effect, the student is unable to supplement their income through TAships. This could explain, in part, why students resort to non-UBC employment.

The current minimum funding (18k) is below the poverty line (20k).

Observation 3



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Guaranteed Funding

- The current Policy established a minimum of \$18,000 CAD/year funding for PhD students.
- The current poverty line in BC is \$20,000 CAD/year.
- Based on the example study, even a student with a stipend of \$22,000 CAD/year is in a precarious situation and would be forced to resort to external employment if the TA is included in the \$22,000.
- Hence, the minimum funding should be increased.

The Roadmap for Improvement

- Eliminate or waive tuition for PhD students.
- Increase guaranteed funding requirements from 4 to 5 years and extend 4YF to 5YF.
- Remove continuing tuition fees for research Master's students.
- Yearly indexing of stipends and fellowships based on cost of education increase.
- Separate TA compensation from stipends.
- Increase minimum funding policy to \$24,000 CAD/year.

How to Start?

Eliminate or waive tuition for PhD students.

- PhD students have a long term commitment and relationship with the University (5+ years) and are the backbone of the research enterprise.
- Can be centrally mandated – requires centralized funding to reduce inequity between disciplines.
- Puts money directly into the pockets of the students.
- Aligns with the UBC Strategic Plan Values (**Excellence** and **Academic Freedom**).
- Aligns with the UBC Strategic Plan themes (**Inclusion** by removing financial barriers, and promotes **Innovation**)
- Direct improvement of Graduate Student **Wellbeing** and immediate relief of **Food Insecurity**.

How to Start?

Eliminate or waive tuition for PhD Students

Strengths

- UBC Strategic plan alignment
- Ability to tackle other BoG priorities: food insecurity, mental health

Opportunities

- Fundraising! There is interest to support excellent, innovative and inclusive research.
- Attract great grad students (academic excellence)

Weaknesses

- Will require centralized funding model (~\$14M/year)

Threats

- Competition.

How to Continue

Removal of Continuing Fees for Research Master's after 2 years.

- Requires consultation with programs but can be centrally implemented.
- Less financially impactful on UBC (only a fraction of students affected).

Yearly indexing of stipends and fellowships based on the cost of education increase.

- Addresses the core issue of raising cost of living and education and establishes a solid long term sustainable approach.
- Requires consultation and careful crafting since funding is very different program to program (hence why we should start with tuition waiver).