



Subject: Request to Waive Tuition Collected as a Continuing Fee in Extenuating Circumstances

Date: July 19th, 2020

Dear members of the Finance Committee,

This submission is made on behalf of the Graduate Student Society (GSS) of UBC Vancouver and the Alma Mater Society (AMS).

We would like to start by appreciating the efforts that the administration continues to put in understanding the way the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted graduate students. Many of these issues were well reflected in the presentation¹ to the Learning & Research Committee in June's cycle, on which we provided positive feedback and suggested areas to prioritize².

This submission is to express our support for the proposal to authorize the administration to waive tuition collected as continuing fees for graduate students in cohort programs in extenuating circumstances. It is very encouraging to see this type of broad-based approach that recognizes the far reaching consequences that the pandemic continues to have on graduate students and we support a framework that does not financially penalize students for delays that are caused by external factors outside of their control. Waiving the collection of continuing fees will benefit all affected students, but it will be particularly beneficial for those who have limited financial capacity and must take debt in order to pursue professional graduate programs, which, in some cases, can have continuing fees of upwards of \$15,000 per installment for international students.

The GSS and the AMS would also like to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the finance committee to the fact that graduate students in the research stream, both Masters and PhD, have also experienced delays as a result of many factors resulting directly or indirectly from the pandemic, such as the inability to make meaningful progress in research due to, for example, the research curtailment, inability to travel and increased caregiving responsibilities.

In a recent survey carried out by the AMS and the GSS, in collaboration with UBC, which received over 1600 responses from graduate students, over half of respondents indicated that they were moderately or extremely concerned about graduation timelines. Similarly, over 65% of respondents indicated that they were moderately or extremely concerned about personal issues that arose as a result of the pandemic and the impact on their work.

¹ Impact of COVID-19 on Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows.

https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/05/4_2020.06_Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Graduate-Students.pdf

² GSS & UBCSUO joint submission on the Impact of COVID-19 on Graduate Students.

https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/06/1.7_2020.06_GSS-and-UBCSUO-Submission-re-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Graduate-Students.pdf



While this proposal, in its present form, establishes a clear mechanism to avoid unfairly collecting fees from graduate students in cohort programs as a result of causes outside of their control, it does not provide a streamlined process to prevent unfairly burdening students in the research programs. Consequently, we strongly recommend that a similar proposal, to waive the collection of at least one term of continuing fees from graduate students in the research stream, is developed by the administration and approved by this committee. This would ensure that all graduate students receive a fair and equitable response from the University.

Graduate students are the backbone of the research and teaching endeavours of the University, and we look forward to continuing to work with the administration to improve their experience at UBC.

Yours Sincerely,

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