



Subject: Access to Faculty and Staff Housing Rental Discount

Date: September 18th, 2020

Dear members of the Board of Governors,

This submission is made on behalf of the Graduate Student Society (GSS) and the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC Vancouver to recommend that the Board and the Administration evaluate the possibility of extending the *Faculty & Staff Discount* for rental housing on campus to UBC Graduate Students. We would further recommend adopting an Awards-Based system to determine Graduate Student eligibility for this proposed discount program.

The AMS and the GSS are pleased to see the continued focus on higher education affordability in the discussions that take place at the highest level of decision making in the University. Housing is, next to tuition, one of the main sources of financial pressure for students. On average, for doctoral students in UBCV, housing costs represent 50% of expenses after tuition (Figure 1).

Graduate students dedicate upwards of 40 hours a week on average to their graduate education (Figure 2). However, the vast majority of these students still need to engage in other forms of paid work to meet their financial needs, averaging an extra 8 hours of work each week¹. As a result, the average work week is well above the 40-hour work week of the average full time employed Canadian (Figure 3). It is well documented that a continued workload at high levels negatively effects on a person's wellbeing, contributing to cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes, and depression and anxiety². Our 2019 GSS Student Satisfaction Survey showed that 60% of UBC grad students experienced stress or anxiety at a level considered to be unhealthy during their time at UBC. 45% of respondents also indicated that finances were a source of stress or anxiety, coupled with 48% of respondents indicating that their academic workload was also a source of stress of anxiety.

It also worth noting that there is an inverse correlation between the time dedicated to research and the time dedicated to paid work; that is, the more hours graduate students have to spend on paid work outside of their education, the less time they have for their research. Therefore, these financial pressures graduate students experience not only negatively impacts their health and wellbeing, but also the research productivity of the University.

Relieving financial pressures on graduate students would not only improve their own wellbeing, but would also return their focus to the University and allow for increased dedication to research and academic pursuits. We believe this aligns strongly , in line with the strategic commitments that the University has made to Academic Excellence.

¹ Source: 2019 GSS Funding Survey

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6617405/>



Hence, we request that the Board of Governors and the Administration explore the possibility of extending the Faculty & Staff rental discount for on campus housing to Graduate Students. It is our understanding that this discount is currently provided in the form of tax benefits, which may not be compatible with the current funding structures that are applicable to graduate students. However, we believe that an Awards based system could be implemented to provide the subsidy.

Looking even further, an award-based system could incorporate a *subsidy geared to income or geared to need*, which can expand the ability of the University to alleviate housing insecurity. Easier access to affordable housing can be a determining factor for certain groups of students who are disproportionately negatively affected by housing insecurity, such as students with young children, an issue that is intimately tied with gender equitable access to higher education.

Furthermore, increasing financial accessibility to alternative housing on campus can alleviate the pressure on student housing, of which only 40% is year-round³, and suitable to accommodate graduate students, with even more limited options for students who have families.

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. We are eager to collaborate and explore all other possible avenues to increase the availability of high quality affordable housing for graduate students of the University.

Yours Sincerely,

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³ Source: UBC student housing facts and figures 2018. <https://news.ubc.ca/2018/08/22/ubc-student-housing-facts-and-figures/#:~:text=Of%20UBC%27s%20student%20residences%2C%20approximately.cent%20serves%20the%20winter%20session>



Appendix – Figures

How much do you spend on average in the following categories per YEAR? Doctoral

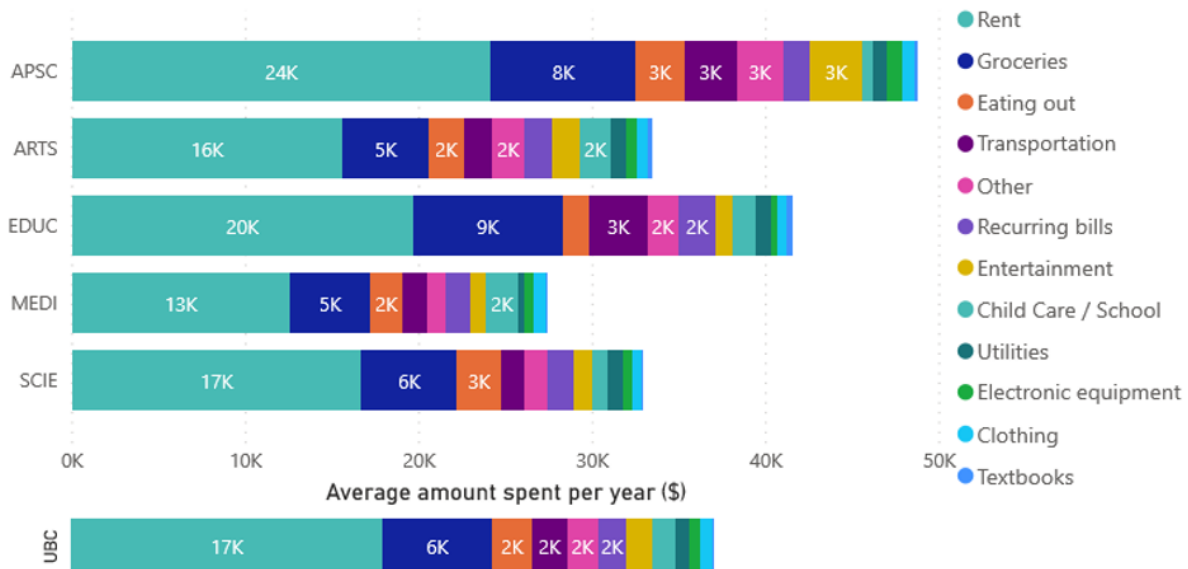


Figure 1 - Yearly average expenses of Doctoral students at UBC-V by faculty. Tuition is not included.⁴

⁴ Source: 2019 GSS Affordability Survey



How many hours per WEEK do you spend on: Doctoral

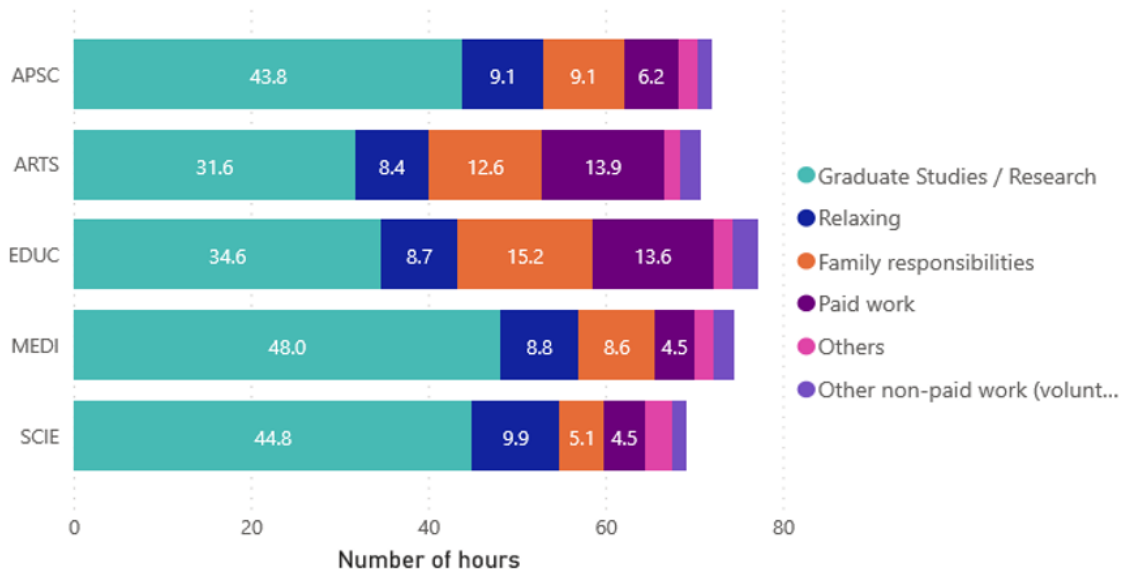


Figure 2 – Average weekly time dedication of Doctoral Students to Graduate studies, family responsibilities, leisure, paid and volunteer work, by faculty.⁵

		Canada (map)				
		Main job				
		Both sexes				
		25 to 54 years				
Hours worked	Type of work	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Hours						
Average usual hours ³	Both full- and part-time employment	37.7	37.6	37.7	37.7	37.6
	Full-time employment ⁴	40.3	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.1
	Part-time employment ⁵	18.7	18.6	18.7	18.6	18.6
Average actual hours (worked in reference week) ⁶	Both full- and part-time employment	37.4	37.4	37.3	37.6	37.0
	Full-time employment ⁴	39.9	39.9	39.7	40.0	39.3
	Part-time employment ⁵	18.9	18.8	18.9	18.9	19.0

Figure 3 - Average usual and actual hours for full time employees in Canada, between 2015 and 2019. ⁶

⁵ Source: 2019 GSS Affordability Survey

⁶ Source: Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410004301>