



Subject: Tuition Consultation

Date: April 9th, 2021

Dear Members of the Board of Governors,

This submission is made on behalf of the Graduate Student Society (GSS) of UBC Vancouver on the proposed tuition increases for the 2021/22 academic cycle.

Background

Graduate students account for almost 20% of the total headcount at the Vancouver Campus (9,981 out of 56,331 total students)¹. Graduate students are distinct from undergraduate students and can be further subdivided into professional master, research masters and PhD students, with each group being approximately a third of total enrollment².

Research graduate students, in particular at the doctoral level, dedicate upwards of 40 hours a week on average to their graduate program (Figure 2). It is important to emphasize that, by and large, this time dedication is primarily towards advancing the research mission of the University, on topics ranging from the impact of HIV on aging populations³, to Black feminism⁴, to augmented reality application in robot assisted surgery⁵, just to name a few. The University's place as a world leader in innovation and centre for research excellence would simply not be possible without the invaluable contributions of graduate students.

Nevertheless, graduate students are asked not only to contribute their time and effort to advance the mission of the University, but they are also asked to contribute to the financial bottom line of the institution, in the form of tuition payments.

It is true that most research programs will provide graduate students with forms of financial support and forms of external support are available, in particular for domestic students, such as Tri-council scholarships.

¹ Source: 2018/19 UBC Enrollment Report. (<https://academic.ubc.ca/sites/vpa.ubc.ca/files/documents/2018-19%20Enrolment%20Report.pdf>)

² Source: UBC Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral studies "Enrollment and Demographics". <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/about-us/graduate-education-analysis-research/enrolment-demographics>

³ Ni Gusti Ayu Nanditha. Faculty of Medicine. Research topic: "Burden of HIV and chronic comorbidities in BC's aging populations: A population-based cohort study". <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/campus-community/meet-our-students/nanditha-ni-gusti-ayu>

⁴ Adeerya Johnson. Faculty of Arts. Research topic: "Hip-hop feminism, hip-hop studies, dirty south feminism and Black feminist methodology to explore the impact of southern Black womanhood and Black women's sexual identities from southern hip-hop artists through dance and performance." <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/campus-community/meet-our-students/johnson-adeerya>

⁵ Megha Kalia. Faculty of Applied Science. Research topic: "Making Augmented Reality Feasible for Robot Assisted Surgery." <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/campus-community/meet-our-students/kalia-megha>



However, as a result of the high financial pressure resulting from tuition, housing and general cost of living in Vancouver, 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 week⁶. It is noteworthy that the average work week is well above the 40-hour work week of the average full time employed Canadian (Figure 3).

It is well established and documented that a continued high workload has detrimental effects on a person's wellbeing, leading to a number of health issues, including, but not limited to, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes, and depression and anxiety⁷. The 2019 GSS Student Satisfaction Survey showed that 60% of UBC graduate students experienced stress or anxiety at a level considered to be unhealthy during their time at UBC, with 45% of respondents indicating that finances were a source of stress or anxiety, and 48% that their academic workload was also a source of stress or anxiety.

Even engaging in sustained prolonged work hours, with the negative effects on physical and mental health described above, a significant fraction of graduate students still experience food insecurity, as suggested by the report to the People, Community and International Committee of the Board on the food insecurity initiative⁸. Considering there is evidence that students sacrifice food in order to pay for tuition, rent and textbooks⁹, it is not surprising that the affordability crisis that students experience as a result of their relative low income would manifest in this way. Food insecurity combined poor work/life balance not only directly affects the students, but also reflects in diminished research capacity, resulting in a negative impact in the university's research mission.

Undue financial pressure not only negatively impacts the students and the institution, but it is also a barrier to participation from members of historically marginalized communities. Research carried out by the GSS has shown that even at the doctoral level, students rely on personal savings, family support and loans to make ends meet (Figure 4). It then follows that prospective students who do not possess generational wealth, or are unable to accrue significant savings prior to applying to graduate school are significantly disadvantaged. This additional barrier in direct opposition to the stated commitments to equity, diversity & inclusion that the University has made.

Tuition increases at the graduate level have a disproportionate negative impact on the student for only a marginal return to the institution. The impacts of continued tuition and housing increases on graduate students has been illustrated to the Board in a presentation during December 2019¹⁰. When tuition accounts for approximately 50% of the expenses of a doctoral student on minimum funding (22,000 \$/year effective

⁶ Source: 2019 GSS Funding Survey

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6617405/>

⁸ https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/11/5_2020.11_Food-Insecurity-Update.pdf

⁹ "HUNGRY FOR KNOWLEDGE: Assessing the prevalence of student food insecurity on five Canadian campuses". Drew Silverton.

¹⁰ "The Graduate Student Experience" Graduate Student Society. Presentation to the Board of Governors, December 2019. https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2019/11/0_2019.12_Graduate-Students-SocietyPres.pdf



Sep. 1st 2021), a 2% increase, which is seemingly only a 1% increase in financial pressure, actually translates into as much as a 5% decrease in disposable income (assuming \$4000 after tuition and housing). On the University side, an across-the-board increase in the tuition revenue from doctoral students of 2%, only accounts for approximately an incremental disposable revenue of 30,000 \$/year for the institution (based on the estimations for the annual cost of a partial and full PhD tuition waiver that led to the implementation of the PAEIPA award). Needless to say, this incremental revenue is completely negligible in the operating budget of the University.

In summary, at the graduate level, an increase in tuition of 2% significantly damages the financial wellbeing of graduate students without resulting in any meaningful benefit for the financial wellbeing of the institution. Hence, it would simply be a poor decision, not based on fact or sound financial reasoning, to approve tuition increases for graduate students.

Recommendations

Based on the rationale shared in the background, and in line with prior communications and presentations to the Board of Governors on eliminating graduate student poverty¹¹, the graduate student society recommends:

- Expansion of the Presidents Academic Excellence Initiative PhD Award (PAEIPA) to 100% of doctoral tuition, effectively eliminating PhD tuition.
- Rejection of the increase of tuition increases at the master level.

As always, we remain available for any additional consultation that may be necessary and look forward to seeing these proposals prioritized in the upcoming decisions.

Yours Sincerely,

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¹¹ https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/09/1.3_2020.09_Vancouver-AMS-and-GSSPres.pdf



Appendix – Figures

How many hours per WEEK do you spend on: Doctoral

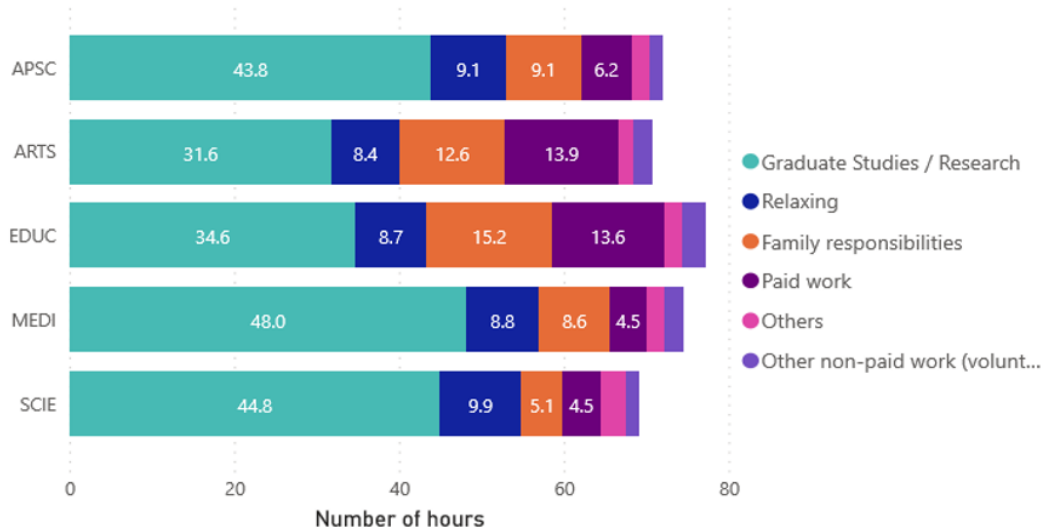


Figure 1 – Average weekly time dedication of Doctoral Students to Graduate studies, family responsibilities, leisure, paid and volunteer work, by faculty.¹²

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

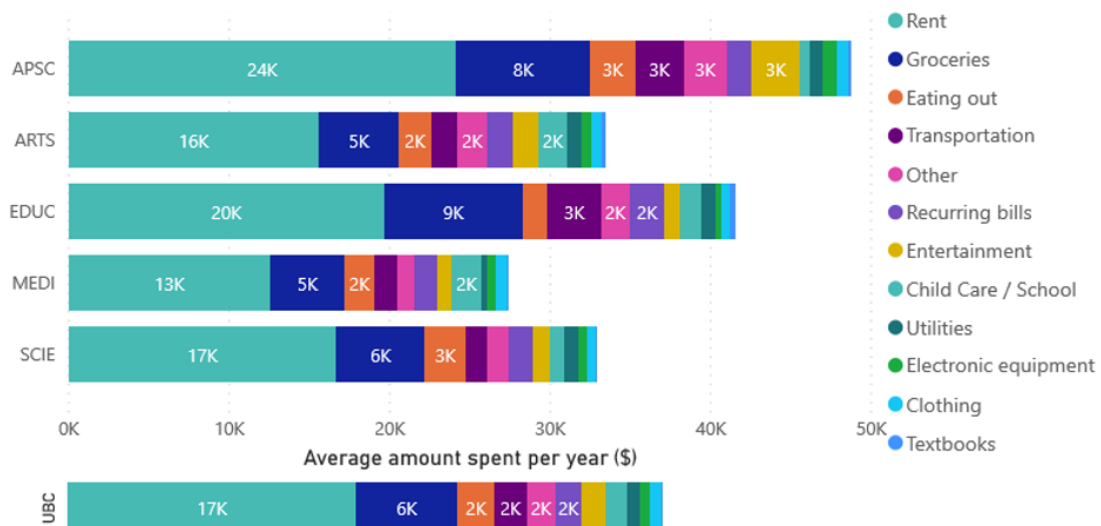


Figure 2 - Yearly average expenses of Doctoral students at UBC-V by faculty. Tuition is not included.¹³

¹² Source: 2019 GSS Affordability Survey

¹³ Source: 2019 GSS Affordability Survey



		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. ¹⁴

Please indicate any additional funding that you had to rely on from each category below for the current YEAR: Doctoral

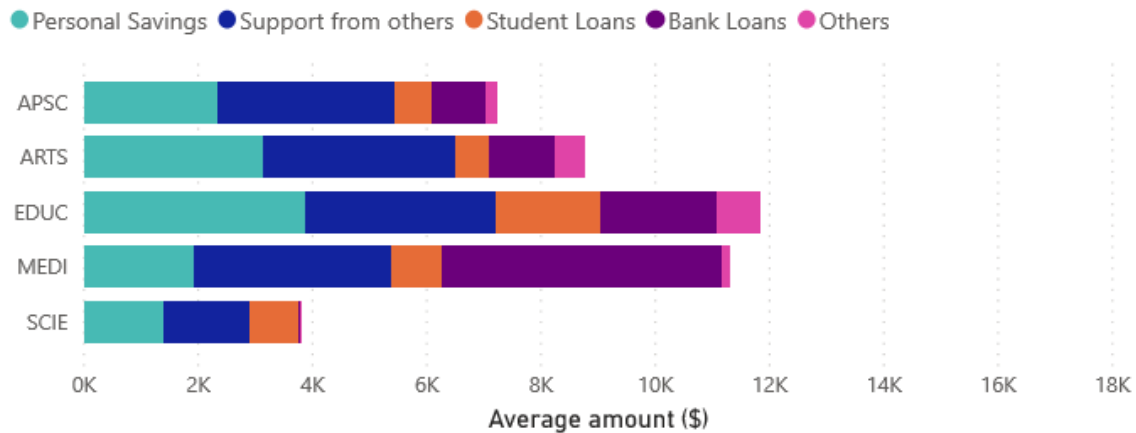


Figure 4 -Additional funding sources for doctoral students.¹⁵

¹⁴ Source: Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410004301>

¹⁵ Source: 2019 GSS Affordability Survey