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**MEMORANDUM**

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**ATTENTION** Senate **DATE** **October 27, 2023**  
**FROM** Mary O’Brien,  
 Chair of Senate Graduate Studies Committee  
 (SGSC)  
**RE:** Minimum Funding Policy

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**For Consultation:** A draft proposal for a new Graduate Funding Policy, which is to become Graduate General Regulation 1.17 “Minimum Funding”. The attached document is being submitted by the Chair of SGSC, Mary O’Brien, for Senate’s consultation. After completing numerous consultations with stakeholders, dates listed below, the final document will be submitted for Senate approval at the December 4<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting, to be effective Fall 2024. This timing will ensure that minimum funding guarantees can be made at the time of admission.

Minimum Funding / Support Policy Draft – to be effective Fall 2024

Consultations to date:

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| SGSC initial consultation (principles)            | September 12, 2023          |
| PSGSC (SGSC subcommittee) initial consultation    | September 14, 2023          |
| Provost Council initial consultation (principles) | September 20, 2023          |
| SGSC policy discussion                            | October 3, 2023             |
| Graduate Program Chair / Assistant consultation   | October 24 and 27, 2023     |
| Program consultations                             | October 30-November 4, 2023 |
| GSS consultation                                  | date TBA                    |
| Senate consultation                               | November 6, 2023            |

The policy will be presented for approval at the December 4, 2023 Senate meeting.

*Background*

SFU acknowledges the contributions made by graduate students to achieving its research and teaching goals. In its 2023 [What’s next: The SFU strategy](#), SFU commits to cultivating “a thriving research and teaching environment”. The 2023-2028 [Strategic Research Plan](#) (SRP) acknowledges the key role played by graduate students in achieving its bold research goals and highlights the need to support them. A key priority of the [SRP Implementation Plan](#) includes supporting research graduate students. More specifically, it lays out the goal of setting a university-wide minimum funding level for PhD students.

The Minimum Funding Policy applies to all PhD students who start their program in September 2024 or later. Programs are encouraged to provide similar levels of funding to all graduate students in their programs who meet the eligibility criteria. Future plans include revisions to the policy to ensure that Minimum Funding is expanded to include Research Master’s students. While programs are encouraged to

set program-level minimum funding levels for Master's students, the current policy does not include Master's students for the following reasons:

- The category "Research Master's" at SFU covers a wide range of student work (i.e., theses, projects, essays) and tuition models/specialty fees. Graduate Studies is working through its committees to understand these differences and to systematically distinguish among them.
- Because programs are responsible for their own funding levels, it would not be feasible in some programs—especially those that do not currently have minimum funding guarantees—to extend current funds to Master's students at the same time as they work to ensure that all PhD students are appropriately funded in time for Fall 2024.

SFU acknowledges that the minimum funding level established in the Policy is a floor and encourages programs to set a higher minimum. Funding graduate students plays an important role in students' overall mental health and well-being and in their ability to complete their programs in a timely manner. Supporting and appropriately funding graduate students remains a top priority, and Graduate Studies will continue to work with programs to extend the funding policy to Research Master's students and to find meaningful ways to support all graduate students.

The funding policy must be revised, at a minimum, every three years.

The following will be made available to programs upon approval of the GGR:

- Program-level funding template
- Sample program-level funding letter
- Sample annual funding letter

## PhD Minimum Funding

*This funding policy will become GGR 1.17.*

### 1.17 Minimum Funding

#### 1.17.1 Scope

This policy applies to SFU graduate programs offering PhDs. Professional doctoral programs are exempt from this policy.

Programs may, but are not required to, fund graduate students in additional programs. This information is provided in program-level funding policies.

#### 1.17.2 Funding levels

Starting in September 2024, every graduate program offering a PhD will provide annual funding of at least \$28,000 to its eligible PhD students. Programs are encouraged to fund continuing PhD students (i.e., those who began their programs before September 2024) at these levels. The extent to which programs provide minima to continuing students is outlined in program-level funding policies.

Program-level funding policies may establish minima that exceed those provided here. Program-level minima take precedence over those established here.

#### 1.17.3 Funding term

Every PhD student who meets the eligibility requirements will receive annual minimum funding for at least four years from the start of the first term in attendance. Additional funding beyond four years may be available at the discretion of programs, which are encouraged to consider extenuating circumstances that may require some students to take longer than 4 years for their programs and to allocate funding to those students accordingly.

#### 1.17.4 Funding sources

The funds for program-level funding policies may come from, but are not limited to, any of the following internal and external sources: scholarships and awards disbursed by Graduate Studies (e.g., PhD Research Scholarship, BASS-funded awards); program-specific awards or scholarships (e.g., Graduate Fellowships, donor awards); scholarship funding provided by a supervisor; TA assignments; RA assignments; sessional teaching; research support assignments; other external scholarships or awards (e.g., Tri-Agency awards).

Where possible, when a student receives scholarship funding from a supervisor grant, every effort should be made to ensure that these funds are stable and predictable throughout a funding year.

PhD students who are funded by major funding sources external to Canada (e.g., foreign government funding) or by another external body (e.g., a workplace) to an amount

equal to or greater than the amount established in 1.17.2 may be admitted without additional funding pending approval from Graduate Studies. In such an instance, the graduate program accepting the student must assume responsibility for funding the student if the external funding is discontinued.

#### **1.17.5 Excluded funding sources**

Funding from an organization associated with First Nations, Métis or Inuit groups will not be considered funding under this policy. PhD students who receive such funding are eligible for the full minimum funding amount outlined in this policy.

#### **1.17.6 Responsibility**

According to [Graduate General Regulation 1.3.1](#), students are admitted to graduate programs. Funding commitments are therefore made on behalf of the graduate program, which must ensure that the student is funded for the duration of the guaranteed funding period. Oversight of funding minima is the responsibility of supervisors, supervisory committees, graduate program committees and Graduate Studies.

If a supervisor who provides financial support to a student becomes unable to meet their funding obligations (e.g., illness or departure from SFU), it is the responsibility of the program to meet program-level funding minima.

#### **1.17.7 Funding guarantees**

Programs will provide all eligible students with a statement of guaranteed minimum funding. Specifics must include the amount of annual funding minimum, number of funded terms and conditions for continued funding in their admission letters issued by Graduate Studies. This annual funding amount must meet or exceed the program-level minimum. Admission letters will outline potential funding sources but do not need to indicate the precise sources of funding over the course of the program.

Students must be provided with precise information about their funding (e.g., value of TA assignments, RA assignments, scholarship funding) prior to the outset of each funding year. Variations in funding per term across any year should be minimized.

#### **1.17.8 Eligibility**

Minimum funding has been established to support students who are not engaged in professional work outside of SFU. Students who are working professionals will not receive a minimum funding guarantee.

A student's guaranteed funding depends on their registration in their graduate program, a CGPA of 3.0 or higher, and satisfactory progress in the program as outlined in [GGR 1.8.1](#). A student's progress will be deemed satisfactory in cases in which the student has met the CGPA requirement but does not have an official evaluation of student progress up to the end of the second term of enrolment. Programs are encouraged to make use of the GPR for this purpose.

Students who are on an approved [leave of absence](#) do not receive funding while on leave, but funding will resume upon their return to regular enrolment. Except for students who take a personal leave, time on leave does not count against the terms of guaranteed minimum funding.

Students enrolled in Co-operative Education or Internships will not receive funding during Co-op or Internship terms. As per [GGR 1.4.7](#), time in the Co-operative Education or Internship will not count toward the terms of guaranteed minimum funding.

If a supervisor indicates that a student is not making satisfactory progress, the supervisor must work with the Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Program Committee to review the student's performance as outlined in [GGR1.8](#). Funding cannot be reduced or withheld without approval of the Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Studies.

Except when a student holds full-time, professional employment, a student's eligibility to receive funding will not be affected by outside employment as long as they are making satisfactory progress.

#### **1.17.9 Self-funding**

Programs may exceptionally recommend admission of self-funded PhD students to the Dean and Vice-Provost of Graduate Studies with a rationale that includes the following: a) the availability and agreement to provide adequate supervision; b) evidence of the student's ability to fund themselves (e.g., affidavit of support or sponsorship); c) an indication that the student will have access to all necessary materials and equipment; d) future funding opportunities available to the student; and e) a contingency plan that outlines what will happen in the case that the student's personal funding source is no longer viable. The final decision on admission of self-funded students will be made by the Dean and Vice-Provost of Graduate Studies.

#### **1.17.10 Refusal of specific funding sources**

When a program-level funding policy allows for the assignment of TA or RA funding and a student declines the assignment, the annual funding offered to the student will be reduced by the amount associated with the assignment that has been declined.

#### **1.17.11 Impact of winning non-departmental scholarships and awards**

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for competitive scholarships and awards available outside of their academic unit (e.g., donor awards, open faculty or university-wide awards, external agency funds, such as MITACS, CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC funding). Programs may require them to apply as an eligibility condition for future funding.

When students are successful in securing scholarship and/or award funding outside of their academic unit's adjudication and valued over \$5,000, SFU sources designated to meet minima may be reduced. This is only while the award funding is being paid (i.e., programs are not required to pay the entire minimum funding amount congruently with the scholarship funding). In these cases, the student must be better off (i.e., winning a scholarship cannot result

in less funding than originally planned, but programs can now include that scholarship funding in the minimum). This model enables programs to both reward scholarship success and to more equitably distribute funds among students in their programs.

Program-level funding policies must indicate minimum levels of top-up funding. It is up to programs to determine the source of top-up funds.

#### **1.17.12 Transfer from Master's to PhD program**

Students who transfer from a Master's to a PhD program within the first year of their Master's must receive a minimum 4 years of PhD funding. Students who transfer from a Master's to a PhD program after completing more than 1 year of a Master's must receive a minimum 3 years of PhD funding, regardless of time spent in a Master's. Transfer from Masters to PhD is not normally permitted after two years of enrolment.

#### **1.17.13 Funding students with accommodations**

Students with documented accommodations may require more time or additional resources to complete their graduate program than other students. The overall funding received by all students in the program must remain equivalent. As such, if the number of funding terms needs to be increased, the amount of funding provided per year may be adjusted. Any such decisions must be made in consultation with the student, Graduate Studies and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning.

#### **1.17.14 Sharing of funding information**

Programs must do their best to track funding that students receive from on-campus sources. Students are expected to inform their program immediately if they receive any additional internal or external scholarships or awards over the course of their graduate program. Failure to report these additional funding sources may result in a reduction of future funding.

#### **1.17.15 Tuition and fees**

Students are responsible for paying tuition and fees. When a student owes fees associated with tuition or fees, this balance will be paid before a student receives funding as pay.

#### **1.17.16 Revisions to this policy**

This policy must be revised, at a minimum, every three years.

#### **1.17.17 Program-level funding policies**

Each graduate program must establish a funding policy that is consistent with this Minimum Funding Policy. These policies must:

- a. provide a realistic expectation of the time that students will take to complete the graduate program;
- b. indicate the number of years that students will be funded;
- c. establish a funding level that meets or exceeds the amount set out in 1.17.2;
- d. indicate potential sources of funding that count toward meeting the minimum funding level;

- e. indicate the extent to which future funding is based on students applying for major external scholarships and awards;
- f. indicate the timing of students' funding payments throughout the year (i.e., whether equal payments will be provided every term or whether payments may fluctuate over the academic year).

DRAFT