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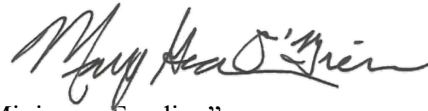
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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate

DATE **November 16, 2023**

FROM Mary O'Brien,
Chair of Senate Graduate Studies Committee
(SGSC)



RE: New Graduate General Regulation (GGR) 1.17 "Minimum Funding"

For Approval: Based on extensive, university-wide consultations outlined below, Senate is asked to consider the new Graduate General Regulation (GGR) 1.17 "Minimum funding". This gives rise to the following motion, effective **Fall 2024**.

Motion:

That Senate approve the new Graduate General Regulation 1.17 "Minimum Funding."

Background

In alignment with the [Strategic Research Plan Implementation Plan's](#) priority of "supporting research graduate students" and the associated action of setting "a university-wide minimum funding level for PhD students," Graduate Studies proposes GGR 1.17 "Minimum funding."

The minimum of \$28,000 for four years has been proposed on the basis of a student-by-student analysis across all SFU PhD programs and a scan of PhD funding levels and tuition rates across Canada (Table 1)¹. Based on program data from 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, it is evident that programs have the funds to provide this level of support. It is important to note there is currently a great deal of variability across programs and among students in a given program, with some programs funding students well beyond four years. Especially with the introduction of the \$5,400 [PhD Research Scholarship](#), Graduate Studies is confident that programs will be able to provide four years of \$28,000 in guaranteed funding to students who are starting their PhD programs in Fall 2024. This level of funding is essential for recruiting and retaining graduate students who will live in Vancouver, where the cost of living for a single domestic student who is sharing accommodation has been estimated to be at least \$2,300 per month. Providing incoming PhD students with a four-year funding guarantee will enable students to plan for stable funding throughout their degree and should ultimately be associated with improved mental health and greater satisfaction and may result in shorter completion times.

Senators will note that a number of changes have been made to the document since the November 2023 Senate meeting. These are based on feedback from graduate programs, Senate and SGSC.

Consultations

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

¹ Students are required to pay tuition at these institutions. 2023-2024 graduate tuition at SFU is \$6,198 for PhD students in terms 1-8 and \$3,099 from term 9 until they complete their program.

Graduate Program Chair / Assistant consultation	October 24 and 27, 2023
Program consultations (n=21)	October 30-November 4, 2023
GSS consultation	November 1, 2023
Senate consultation	November 6, 2023
SGSC consultation	November 7, 2023
SGSC approval	November 14, 2023
Senate approval	December 4, 2023

Next steps:

- Applicants are asked to declare their status as working professionals at the time of application.
- Program-level funding templates will be made available to programs upon approval of the GGR. These must be approved by Graduate Program Committees and Graduate Studies.
- Graduate Studies is in the process of developing a tracking dashboard that will enable transparent oversight of graduate funding levels.

Table 1. Canadian Graduate Funding and Tuition Levels

UNIVERSITY	MINIMUM FUNDING	FUNDING TERM	TUITION (PER ANNUM)
UBC Vancouver	\$22k (2021) <i>Average: \$31k</i>	4 years	Domestic \$5,408 International \$9,500
UBC Okanagan	\$22k (2023)	4 years	Domestic \$5,408 International \$9,500
Brock	\$14k dom., \$24k int. (2023)	Based on prog. length	Domestic \$8,176 International \$23,504
Calgary	\$22k dom., \$24k int. (2022)	4 years	Domestic \$3,604 International \$8,408
McMaster	\$17.5k + tuition	12 terms	Domestic \$6,307 International \$6,307
Queen's	\$18k	4 years	Domestic \$5,773 International \$5,773
McGill	\$13-27k dom., \$12-38k int. (2021) <i>Average: \$26k</i>	7+ years, decreasing over time	Domestic \$4,321 International \$26,563
Saskatchewan	\$20k (2023)		Domestic \$4,932 International \$4,932
Toronto	\$18k, var. across programs (2022) <i>Average: \$36k in yr. 1, \$42k in yr. 4</i>	4-5 years	Domestic \$8,214 International \$8,696
Montreal	\$22k (2020)	3 to 5 years full-time.	Domestic \$2,022 International \$9,436
Western	\$23.3k (2023) <i>Average: \$32.6k</i>	4 years	Domestic \$6,360 International \$6,360
Ottawa	\$18k	4 years	Domestic (in Ottawa) \$6,367 Domestic (outside Ottawa) \$6,685 International \$17,478
Waterloo	\$26k (2023)	4 years	Domestic \$6,762 International \$22,188

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 (see GGR 1.17.16), which must be approved by the respective Graduate Program Committee and Graduate Studies.

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 all eligible PhD students.

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

Programs are encouraged to fund continuing PhD students (i.e., those who began or who were initially offered admission to their programs before September 2024) at these levels. The extent to which a program provides minima to continuing students is outlined in each program-level funding policy.

1.17.3 Funding term

Every PhD student who meets the eligibility requirements will receive annual minimum funding for at least 12 terms of enrolment from the start of the first term in attendance. Additional funding beyond 12 terms may be available at the discretion of programs, which are encouraged to consider circumstances or requirements that may require some students to take longer than 12 terms for their programs and to allocate funding to those students accordingly.

1.17.4 Funding sources

The funds included in program-level funding policies are varied. The funds 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](#), base allocation student support (BASS)-funded awards such as Graduate Fellowships (GF) and Minor Research Awards);
- program-specific awards or scholarships (e.g., donor awards);
- scholarship funding provided by a supervisor;
- employment TA assignments;
- employment RA assignments;
- sessional teaching;
- other external scholarships or awards (e.g., Tri-Agency awards, Mitacs).

To ensure more stable funding, when a student receives scholarship funding from a supervisor grant, every effort should be made to ensure that these funds are 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., workplace sponsorship funding) 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 is responsible for ensuring that the student is funded for the duration of the guaranteed funding period. Oversight of funding minima is shared by supervisors, supervisory committees, graduate program committees, faculties 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 in their offer of admission letters issued by Graduate Studies. These will outline potential funding sources but do not need to indicate the precise sources of funding over the course of the program. Letters provided by programs will provide more specific details. Specifics must include the amount of the annual funding minimum, number of funded terms, and program-specific conditions for continued funding. The annual funding amount must meet or exceed the program-level minimum.

In addition, students must be provided with term-specific or annual information about their funding sources (e.g., value of TA assignments, expectation of the number of TA assignments accepted per year by the student, RA assignments, scholarship funding). Variability in funding per term across any year should be minimized.

When students accept RA or TA assignments in addition to the guaranteed sources of funding throughout the academic year, the funding associated with the sources of funding defined in the annual minima should not be reduced as long as students continue to meet the

expectations associated with satisfactory performance and satisfactory progress in the duties associated with existing assignments.

1.17.8 Eligibility

Minimum funding has been established to support students who are not engaged in professional work. Students who are working professionals might not receive a minimum funding guarantee. Except when a student holds professional employment, a student's eligibility to receive funding will not be affected by outside employment as long as they are making satisfactory progress.

A student's guaranteed funding depends on their registration in their graduate program, a CGPA of 3.0 or higher, satisfactory progress in the program as outlined in [GGR 1.8.1](#) and satisfactory performance in teaching assistantships (as per Article 13 (c) 3b) and research assistantships. Programs are encouraged to make use of the GPR to report on satisfactory progress. Up to the end of the third term of enrolment, a student's progress may be deemed satisfactory in cases where the student has met the CGPA requirement but does not yet have an official report of student progress. Unsatisfactory performance in teaching assistantships must be documented via a Teaching Assistant Evaluation. Any unsatisfactory performance must be reported to the Graduate Program Director.

Students who are on an approved [leave of absence](#) do not receive guaranteed University funding while on leave. Normal funding minima will resume upon students' 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 program-level funding during Co-op or Internship terms. Time in non-required Co-operative Education or Internship programs will normally be included in the twelve terms of guaranteed minimum funding.

If a thesis, research or teaching 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. Unsatisfactory performance may result in an overall reduction of funding, but funding may not be reduced or withheld without approval of the Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Studies.

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 appropriate 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 graduate program

accepting the student must assume responsibility for funding the student if the external funding is discontinued. 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, scholarships, or awards, and a student fails to apply for TA or declines the assignment, scholarship, or award in a given term, the annual funding offered to the student will be reduced by the amount associated with the funding that has been declined or not applied for. This may result in annual funding that is below the guaranteed minimum.

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). These competitive scholarships and awards contribute to the guaranteed funding minimum. Programs may require students to apply for scholarships and awards as an eligibility condition for future funding.

When students are successful in securing competitive scholarship and/or award funding outside of their academic unit's adjudication, other 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 being awarded a scholarship or award must receive more funding than originally planned, but programs may revise their portion of the funding minima as per the program-level funding policy. 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 provide information about the amount and sources of funding adjustments associated with winning competitive scholarships and awards.

1.17.12 Transfer from Master's to PhD program and from a PhD program to a Master's program

Students who transfer from a Master's to a PhD program within the first three terms of their Master's must receive a minimum 12 terms of PhD funding. Students who transfer from a Master's to a PhD program after completing more than three terms of a Master's must receive funding associated at least nine terms of PhD funding, regardless of time spent in a Master's. Transfer from Master's to PhD is not normally permitted after six terms of enrolment.

Students who transfer from a PhD to a Master's program will only receive funding if a) the Master's program into which they transfer guarantees funding to Master's students; and b) the transfer takes place within the guaranteed minimum funding period associated with the Master's program. No time will be added to the guaranteed minimum funding period.

1.17.13 Funding students with accommodation needs

The overall funding received by all students in the program, regardless of whether a student requires an alteration of their working environment, curriculum format or other modification to content to make progress in their coursework or research, must meet or exceed the funding minimum. Students with documented accommodation needs may require more time or additional resources to complete their graduate program. Programs are encouraged to work with the student, Graduate Studies and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning to determine how to address these needs with the goal of achieving equitable outcomes.

1.17.14 Sharing of funding information

Programs must do their best to track funding that students receive from funding sources as outlined in 1.17.4 and students' status as working professionals. Students are expected to inform their program immediately if they receive any additional internal or external scholarships or awards or if they become working professionals over the course of their graduate program. Failure to report additional funding sources or professional employment may result in a reduction of future funding. Funding may only be reduced in consultation with Graduate Studies.

1.17.15 Tuition and fees

Students are responsible for paying tuition and fees. When a student owes fees associated with tuition or fees, it may prevent them from enrolling in their graduate program in future terms.

1.17.16 Program-level funding policies

Each graduate program must establish a funding policy that is consistent with this Minimum Funding Policy. These policies must be approved by Graduate Program Committees and:

- a. include the program's definition of equity as it applies to funding;
- b. provide a realistic expectation of the time that students will take to complete the graduate program;
- c. indicate the number of terms that students will be funded;
- d. establish a funding level that meets or exceeds the amount set out in 1.17.2;
- e. indicate the extent to which future funding is based on students applying for external scholarships and awards (or equivalents);
- f. indicate potential sources of funding that count toward meeting the minimum funding level;
- g. 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);
- h. provide information about the impact of Co-operative Education or Internships on the number of eligible terms of guaranteed funding; and
- i. clearly delineate program-level adjustments in the case of winning scholarships and awards.

1.17.17 Policy review

This policy must be reviewed and adjusted, at a minimum, every three years. Policy revisions will apply to newly-admitted students.