

**GRADUATE STUDENTS'
ASSOCIATION**
University of Saskatchewan



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For Immediate Release
April 16, 2022

Graduate Students' Association against Proposed Tuition Hikes

Some observations and analysis of the tuition, funding, and degree delay at the graduate-level study

When the university is reopening following the global pandemic, the graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan are seeing hikes in their tuition, even though not all the students have recovered from the financial, mental, and emotional stress of the pandemic yet. Specially, increasing standard thesis-based Masters tuition fees for international students is fully unsustainable and is not justifiable at this pandemic recovery period.

University's proposal to increase tuition fees until 2025 looks as follows:

- Standard domestic (Masters and PhD) students will see 5% increase in their tuition every year
- International tuition differential (Masters) will increase with a multiplier of 2.0, 2.25, and 2.25 respectively in the years of 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-2025

The tuition increase projection presented by the university translates to a 21.55% tuition fees increase for the domestic MSc and PhD students during the 2023-2024 academic year compared to 2020-2021. On the other hand, international students enrolled in the Masters program will see 8.6%, 26%, 48.83%, and 56.27% more tuition fees during the 2021-2022, 22-23, and 23-24 academic year, respectively compared to the 2020-2021 academic year tuition fees. Unfortunately, the University of Saskatchewan decided to increase its International Tuition Differential fees for its Masters student significantly while other U15 universities started removing the tuition fees difference between domestic and international students to attract more brilliant international students. For example, The Queens University in Canada already removed the tuition fees differences between domestic and international students to foster recruiting high quality international students.

The university's decision to approach the U15 standard in terms of tuition fees is not realistic given the fact that there exists variation in terms of student experiences, funding packages, and financial support in other U15 universities. Canada's economy is heavily benefitted from the innovation of the research work conducted by international graduate students, as low tuition rate, and good funding package attracts more international

students in this province. With the proposed tuition increase in the next few years, the GSA is afraid that the University of Saskatchewan will be behind other U15 universities in terms of innovation and socio-economic development as it will not be able to attract more brilliant international students for its Masters program, the larger portion of the graduate students.

The GSA Executives requested the university to further inquire into the delay in the degree programs. The Executives brought forward this issue in many different standing committees of the university and meetings with the senior leaders. Unlike many other U15 universities in Canada, the graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan takes longer than usual to finish their degrees (median: over 6 years for PhD students and over 3 years for Masters students), which adds financial stress in students' lives, education becomes more expensive, and students are delaying in many important life-decisions, including, but not limited to, joining workforce to contribute to the economy, having children (who are the future of this country), buying houses, etc. GSA is strongly advocating that the degree should be completed within a reasonable amount of time (4 years for PhD and 2 years for standard thesis-based Masters program), except for those students, who have academic accommodations. The GSA wants the university to take immediate steps to establish a working group to assess the negative impact on graduate students and the academic excellence of the University of Saskatchewan.

When GSA communicated with the faculty members for such delay in the degree programs, it was perceived that there is no limit or cap in the number of students a faculty member can supervise in a year. Having a high number of students helps in applying for grant applications for the faculty members, and brings the university more research opportunities. However, there are many faculty members, who are oversubscribed with the number of graduate student supervision. This negatively impacts the supervision quality, collaboration on research, as well as, lead to delay in the graduate program a student is enrolled in. Therefore, the GSA wants the university to form a task force comprising different stakeholders including faculty members, graduate chairs, GSA representatives to identify the root cause of unusually high degree completion timeline and develop policy proposals to bring down graduation timeline within the U15 median.

Not every graduate student receives full funding or scholarships during their study at the University of Saskatchewan. The minimum guaranteed funding that some students receive in this university does not reflect the average (or median) time needed to finish their degrees. As mentioned earlier, on an average, the doctoral students at the University of Saskatchewan take over six years to finish a PhD. However, the minimum guaranteed funding that they receive in their first year of study is usually around for three years. There is no option for graduate students to study part-time and work full-time to support the skyrocketing education costs. Therefore, GSA is requesting minimum guaranteed funding

for PhD students to be at least four years, and for thesis-based Masters students to be at least three years (if the median time needed for Masters students still remains 3 years).

At the University of Saskatchewan, many departments offer a minimum guaranteed funding of less than \$18,000/year, which is way below the minimum wage salary (at the current minimum hourly rate approximately \$22,500/year) a person makes in the province of Saskatchewan. Since the students have to pay high tuition from this limited funding, the money left in their hand to live in Saskatchewan is not enough. Many graduate students' supervisors do not prefer their students to work while studying, as that negatively impacts students' quality of research and the student life. Thus, many graduate students are living below poverty level which is significantly affecting their academic performance, mental health, and financial well being. Therefore, the GSA requested the university to increase the amount of minimum guaranteed funding in a way that goes above the minimum wage salary a person can make in the province of Saskatchewan.

The GSA strongly supports this freezing of tuition once a student starts their academic program when scholarship/stipend does not increase the same way tuition rate increases in the following years. Graduate students also want to see an increase in their stipend/scholarships and want to finish their graduate-level study within a reasonable time (PhD in 4 years, standard thesis-based Masters in 2 years, project-based Masters in 1 year).

Executives, Graduate Students' Association
University of Saskatchewan

The University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students' Association represents over 4400 graduate students.

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