



GRADUATE
STUDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

November 2, 2022

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Summary of the GSA Tuition and Fees Consultation Committee Asks

The GSA recognizes that the tuition increases presented for graduate students are below CPI for thesis-based students—both domestic and international. We also recognize that the university has faced severe budget cuts from the provincial government and, additionally, is under pressure from the Ministry of Advanced Education to further increase the proportion of university revenue generated from student tuition.

Therefore, while we have concerns over the proposed tuition increase for course-based international students (more below), we are prepared to accept the tuition increases presented to TFCC—but with conditions.

We echo the Student's Union's concerns over transparency and consultation, and hope that guidelines can be developed to ensure that open information sharing is the norm for future negotiations. We also share their concerns over the Campus Athletic Fees. The GSA, however, has additional asks that we would like to see fulfilled for our support on the proposed tuition and fee increases:

Ask #1:

(a) Given the ongoing rise in cost-of-living expenses for students, the GSA recommends an annual increase in funding dedicated to strictly needs-based bursaries, at a rate tied to the Alberta CPI.

(b): Additionally, in order to bridge the gap between increases in tuition since 2019 and the funding pool available for needs-based financial aid, the GSA would like to see a 15% exceptional increase in funding towards strictly needs-based bursaries for the next budgeted year.

Justification:

- According to the university's Consolidated Financial Statements, in 2019, the total amount of revenue the university received from tuition and fees was \$242,574,000.¹ In 2022, the total amount of revenue the university received from tuition and fees was \$300,964,000.² That represents a total increase of \$58,390,000 (24.1%) from 2019 to 2022.³
- According to the university's Consolidated Financial Statements, in 2019, the university's expenses on scholarships and bursaries totaled \$100,213,000.⁴ In

¹ University of Calgary, "Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ending March 31, 2019," pg. 6. Accessed: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/finance/sites/default/files/teams/5/fr-2019-financial-statememt.pdf>

² University of Calgary, "Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ending March 31, 2022," pg. 6. Accessed: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/finance/sites/default/files/teams/5/fr-2022-financial-statement.pdf>

³ <https://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/algebra/percent-change-calculator.php>

⁴ Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ending March 31, 2019, pg. 26.

2022, the university's expenses on scholarships and bursaries totaled \$119,090,000.⁵ That represents a total increase of \$18,877,000 or 18.8%.⁶

- The relative growth in revenue from tuition and fees is thus 5.3% higher than the growth in expenses dedicated to scholarships and bursaries during that same period.
- At this time, we do not have any data quantifying the financial need felt by graduate students (our members), resulting from the significant increases to tuition, fees, and cost of living over the past three years. Only anecdotal evidence by way of large numbers of Support-Bursary applicants. While we await a report on students' financial needs, we must work with the perceived need gleaned from the number of applicants, and the clear priority for student financial aid seen in the GSA's Advocacy Priority Survey.
- According to the data that Verity Turpin presented to TFCC, in the 2018-19 academic year, \$5.37 million of the \$100.2 million spent on scholarships and bursaries were dedicated to bursaries; in 2020-21 that number increased to \$10.35 million. Looking at the university's awards page, however, many of the 569 bursaries listed contain academic-merit components and extra-curricular participation, such as the *Annie Manowski and Sylvia Kmet Social Work Award*⁷ and the *Alastair H. Ross Memorial Scholarship*,⁸ two of the most generous bursaries. They are, consequently, not strictly needs-based bursaries.
- Based on this information, we infer that the amount of funding dedicated to strictly needs-based financial assistance is significantly lower than the \$119 million listed above. and insufficient, relative to our perceived student financial need.
- A 15% exceptional increase is intended to cover this inferred discrepancy in bursary funding, relative to inflated need. We arrived at 15% by comparing the percentage increase in funding for scholarships and bursaries since 2019 (18.8%) and then multiplying the delta between tuition/fee increases and scholarship/bursary funding increases (~5%) by the number of years where tuition was increased to the maximum allowed by the province (3).

Further action item: ongoing discussions with the university over the best way to distribute new needs-based funding, whether that's by increasing the annual maximum for bursaries beyond \$1,500, to expanding eligibility for needs-based funding, or—ideally—some combination of the two, depending on demographic needs.

⁵ Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ending March 31, 2022, pg. 27.

⁶ <https://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/algebra/percent-change-calculator.php>

⁷ <https://ucalgary.ca/registrar/awards/annie-manowski-and-sylvia-kmet-social-work-award>

⁸ <https://ucalgary.ca/registrar/awards/alastair-h-ross-memorial-scholarship>

Ask #2: Increased funding to the Student Wellness Centre to hire more counsellors and expand the number of mental health services available to students.

Justification:

- The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) and Abacus Reports have found that 71% of Albertan students believe their post-secondary institutions lack quality mental health services—the highest in the country.⁹
- The same report found that Albertan students were—alongside visible minorities, 2SLGBTQ+ students, Indigenous students, and students living with pre-existing mental health illnesses or disabilities—the most at risk for poor mental health during their studies.¹⁰
- Students have told us that they frequently must go off-campus to access certain mental health services; as the data above shows, this is both because of high demand and lack of supply.

Ask #3: Address students' concerns regarding wait time at the Wellness Centre.

Justification:

- Currently, the family physicians on staff at the Wellness Centre are booked almost entirely through to December, and many of the doctors have limited availability that month too.
- In 2017, the Canadian Institutes for Health Information (CIHI) released a report that stated nearly 20% of Canadians waited at least seven days to see a family physician.¹¹ The CIHI report considers it be a serious failing of healthcare accessibility, and this was before the COVID-19 pandemic made physician accessibility that much more salient.
- If additional funding could be used to hire more doctors, or otherwise reduce wait times without rationing care, this would go a long way to improving student services on campus.

Ask #4: The GSA recommends that the proposed tuition increase for M.Eng. and course-based international students should be at 7.5%.

Justification:

- The GSA appreciates that tuition set for 2022-2023 academic year remains low in comparison to our U15 post-secondary counterparts. However, international students face both information asymmetries and living costs

⁹ CASA, Abacus Data, “The New Abnormal: Student Mental Health Two Years into COVID-19,” pg. 16. Accessed: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/casaacae/pages/3470/attachments/original/1664377984/Abacus_Report_2022_%281%29.pdf?1664377984

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 10.

¹¹ <https://globalnews.ca/news/3251833/canada-has-some-of-the-longest-wait-times-to-see-doctors-specialists-report/amp/>

that domestic students do not have, and as such they are more vulnerable to various forms of insecurity (i.e., food, housing, disposable income, and access to student loans).

- Our preferred proposal is to keep tuition increases for international students in line with their domestic counterparts. However, the GSA acknowledges the constraints imposed by the provincial government due to budget cuts. Therefore, we recommend that if tuition for course-based domestic students will increase by 5.5% (per 3-unit course) then it is reasonable to increase tuition for M.Eng. and course-based international students by not more than 7.5% because of the concerns noted above.

Ask #5: Reduce the residence fee increases to the lower-bound of the ranges, as they were presented to TFCC on October 20th.

Explanation:

At the October 20th TFCC meeting, we were presented a rate change scenario for residence fees that included a range of possible increases for available residence spaces.

- ***Low Demand:*** 0-2%
- ***Medium Demand:*** 3-4%
- ***High Demand:*** 5%+

The rate changes, as they currently stand, are at the maximum of this range for residence.

We recognize that many of the fee increases are below CPI, and that Ancillary Services must recoup the costs of up-keep for residence services. We worry, though, that increasing tuition—in addition to inflationary effects and cost-of-living increases *outside* of inflation—have already stretched student’s finances thin. Moreover, we are concerned that the largest increases fall on the units most occupied by graduate students, who are already the largest users (45%) of the SU Food Bank based on 2021/22 academic year data.

Mitigating increases to housing costs for grad students, by adopting the lower bound of the proposed ranges (save for low demand), we greatly reduce the financial burden that students face—particularly international students, thereby alleviating stressors for mental health and improving the quality of their graduate programs.

Our counterproposal would be, then:

- ***Low demand:*** 1%
- ***Medium Demand:*** 3%
- ***High Demand:*** 5%