



GRADUATE
STUDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

2024

BUDGET SUBMISSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Budget 2024, the
Graduate Students'
Association
recommends the
following



Restore Funding to Post-Secondary Education

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to reverse the budget cuts, adjusted for inflation, made to PSI's through the Campus Alberta Grant since 2018/19.

Support Alberta Innovation and Entrepreneurship

UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to create an additional funding stream to directly fund graduate student research, in the form of grants and scholarships that:

- Create a universal funding floor for all graduate students studying in Alberta;
- Create merit-based scholarships with increasing monetary rewards that culminate in a series of research excellence awards, modeled off the federal Tri-Agency graduate scholarships.

UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to restore the Alberta Graduate Student Travel Incentive program.



Reimagine Student Financial Aid

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to eliminate interest on provincial student loans.
- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to earmark \$243 million for non-repayable student financial aid in Budget 2024 to address the real cuts in funding for non-repayable financial aid from 2021 to 2023.



Cut Red Tap on Post-Secondary Funding

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to end the practice of tying university funding to performance-based metrics such as employment outcomes or graduate wages.

Implement a Province-Wide Evictions Moratorium

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to pause all evictions in the province until after the housing crisis has been solved.



There are two important contextual points to make about this year's provincial budget:

- **More Albertans need government support than ever before;**
- **Oil prices have slumped, recently, and the government's previously projected surplus may not happen.**

The Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary is thus just one of many advocacy organizations seeking government support for our members. We know that, with the new fiscal framework and the amendments made to the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act, money remains tight. It is why we have endeavoured, in this document, to show the contributions that graduate students make to Alberta's economy—its businesses, its research and development, and its international competitiveness—as well as the broader community that all UCalgary graduate students call home.

We hope that we have shown how solutions to the most pressing issues faced by today's graduate students reverberate throughout society; they are complimentary with every other organization seeking to create a fairer, more prosperous, and freer Alberta. Consequently, we call upon the Provincial Government to support innovation and entrepreneurship by creating dedicated research funding streams for graduate students and restoring the Graduate Students Travel Incentive, as outlined in Theme #2; we also call upon the Provincial Government to abolish interest on student loans and restore funding to non-repayable sources of student financial aid, as outlined in Theme #3.

Graduate students are part of an institution, and the healthier that institution is, the more productive, creative, and dedicated graduate students will be. Consequently, we call upon the Provincial Government to restore funding to the Campus Alberta Grant (Theme #1) and end the practice of using performance-based metrics that are tied to factors outside a university's control, such as labour market outcomes (Theme #4).

Finally, we recognize that all Albertans—and not just graduate students—are suffering as a result of skyrocketing rents and unaffordable housing. We also recognize that finding a solution to such a complex problem takes time: to research, to implement, and to adjust as new information comes to light. We also believe, though, that irreparable harm is done to our communities when Albertans are evicted from their homes. Consequently, we call upon the Provincial Government to issue a province-wide moratorium on evictions for one year (Theme #5), in the hopes that some progress has been made to make Alberta's rental market more affordable.

**THEME #1: TAKE BACK THE
CAMPUS ALBERTA GRANT
- RESTORE FUNDING TO
POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION**

All post-secondary institutions (PSIs) in Alberta, including the University of Calgary, receive the majority of their funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education, with “operating grants”—also known as the Campus Alberta Grant (CAG), being the primary vehicle for funding research, teaching, learning, and other academic activities on campus.²

CAG is the essential driver of PSI’s mission to generate novel technologies, make new discoveries, and educate future generations in all knowledge fields. Since 2019/20, however, the provincial government has repeatedly slashed CAG funding to Albertan PSIs. The University of Calgary (UCalgary) alone has seen its CAG funding decrease, in nominal terms, from \$507 million in 2019 to \$414 million in 2023, for a total funding cut of nearly \$93 million.^{3,4}

The cuts are even more profound when adjusting for inflation: UCalgary’s CAG funding declined from \$590 million in 2019 to \$414 million in 2023, for an inflation-adjusted cut of \$176 million dollars.⁵

The inflation-adjusted total matters, as it reflects the declining purchasing power of the institution to pay staff salaries, fund student awards or scholarships, purchase laboratory equipment, and the payment of other services or resources essential for PSIs to meet their researching and teaching missions.

While Budget 2023 promised that CAG would not receive another nominal funding cut,⁶ when factoring in inflation, the CAG budget for all Albertan PSIs has now declined for five years in a row.

As a result of CAG cuts, universities like UCalgary have had to increase tuition to compensate for lost revenue. In nominal terms, the university collected just under \$232 million in tuition in 2019; in 2023 it collected \$329 million, for a total increase of \$97 million or 42%, far higher than the increase in enrollment over this period.^{7,8}

For graduate students, this nominal increase in tuition year-over-year was compounded by increasing mandatory non-instructional fees (MNIFs), which according to Statistics Canada are higher than anywhere else in Canada,⁹ all while inflation provided an effective decrease in the value of their scholarships, wages from academic employment, and financial aid. If we adjust these tuition numbers for inflation, to reflect the purchasing power of universities, then UCalgary collected \$270 million in tuition in 2019 and \$329 million in 2023, for an increase of \$59 million or 22%.¹⁰

CAG cuts, and the subsequent tuition increases, have created a highly precarious and unsustainable situation in Alberta’s post-secondary system. It is a state of affairs that follows directly from the Jason Kenney-commissioned Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta’s Finances (i.e., the “MacKinnon Report”) and explicit government policy.^{11,12}

This precariousness largely falls upon, and is acutely felt by, students—including graduate students.

To begin with, the increased financial pressure on graduate students resulting from CAG cuts has, and will continue to make, post-secondary education inaccessible and unaffordable. A several academic studies have looked at the effects of cost increases (ex: tuition and mandatory fee increases) on student enrollment and program completion rates. A significant portion of this literature has found that inflating tuition and fee costs decrease program enrollment when financial aid does not compensate.^{13,14,15,16}

Notably, this research does not differentiate graduate students from undergraduates. This means that the effect of increasing costs on program accessibility is likely underestimated for graduate students, as graduate students tend to be older and are more likely to be starting a family, with all the associated costs that parenthood brings. Studies have also indicated that high levels of graduate student debt have led to premature exits from graduate programs; delays major degree-related milestones; and creates significant amounts of finance-related stress.^{17,18}

There is further evidence of a positive relationship between program completion and tuition reductions and a negative relationship between program completion and student debt at the graduate level,¹⁹ showing that a reduction in program cost improves a student's chances of successfully completing graduate education.

Secondly, the inflation-adjusted numbers show that despite rapidly increasing tuition, the real purchasing power of the institution remains significantly lower now than it was in 2019:

UCalgary would have to increase tuition another \$117 million to cover the shortfall from persistent CAG cuts.

But as the studies listed above show, doing so would only exacerbate the unaffordability and inaccessibility of post-secondary education in the province. Those numbers are just from the University of Calgary. Persistent CAG cuts have impacted all of Alberta's PSIs and their hundreds of thousands of students.

We are already seeing consequences of reckless funding cuts in Ontario. Laurentian University filed for creditor protection in 2021²⁰ and, on January 9th 2024, the Provost of Queen's University declared that his university would similarly be insolvent by the end of the 2025-26 academic year.²¹ A blue-ribbon panel was convened by the provincial government to provide recommendations on how to increase the financial stability of Ontario's post-secondary system; while the panel's terms of reference limited any considered solutions to being compatible with fiscal conservatism,²² the panel nonetheless found that a major reversal of the government's hack-and-slash approach to university budgets was required to prevent other Ontario institutions from falling into financial ruin.²³ We believe the experience of post-secondary institutions in Ontario invalidates

The MacKinnon Report's optimistic appraisal of per capita funding cuts in Alberta, and the Alberta government's continual endorsement of the panel's conclusions.²⁴

Consequently, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to reverse the budget cuts made to post-secondary institutions through the Campus Alberta Grant since 2018/19, restoring funding to our post-secondary system and allowing Albertan universities to continue pursuing innovative and impactful research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to reverse the budget cuts, adjusted for inflation, made to PSI's through the Campus Alberta Grant since 2018/19.

**THEME #2: SUPPORT
ALBERTA INNOVATION
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Romer noted two stylized facts about innovation systems: ^{25,26,27,28,29}

- 1. Human capital—the accumulated skills, knowledge, dispositions, and experiences that are useful in the production process—is the primary driver of innovation;**
- 2. Due to the non-excludable nature of knowledge, it is typically too risky for firms to invest in human capital or most forms of innovation. This means that, even in a perfectly competitive market, less human capital and innovation will be generated than is socially optimal.**

Consequently, one policy implication of “endogenous growth theory” is that governments ought to fund institutions of higher education to correct for this market inefficiency.³⁰ The downstream benefits of investing in PSIs then include a more robust, adaptive, and effective innovation system, allowing businesses, communities, and public officials the opportunity to draw upon novel products and processes to improve the lives of everyone. Indeed, both the Business Council of Alberta³¹ and the Calgary Chamber of Commerce^{32,33} have both indicated that stable funding support for Alberta’s post-secondary systems are necessary for innovation and productivity, no doubt in recognition of what models such as Romer’s predict.

Graduate students, and the human capital embodied within them, are outsized contributors to PSI-based innovation. For instance, newly graduate students are “twice as likely to as their professors to create spin-off companies,” according to a 2017 report by the House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Industry, Science, and Technology.³⁴

A witness from the private sector added that “[t]he largest intellectual property and technology transfers from academia to Canadian companies occur when one of these innovative companies hires technically well-trained graduating students,” which requires integrating students “into the broader innovation ecosystem in order to do design work, proof of concept and prototyping.”³⁵

Perhaps most importantly, investing in graduate students crowds in additional private investment into research and development (R&D), which is to say that government dollars spent on graduate students eventually lead to greater private sector spending on R&D. Boardman and Ponomariov, in analyzing the characteristics of “entrepreneurial universities,” found that as the number of graduate students supported by grants increased, so did a wide variety of university-industry interactions, such as technology transfer, paid consultation, the creation of patents, or co-authorship of academic papers with members of industry.³⁶

They also found that an increase in students supported by grants increased the likelihood that graduate students would become owners, partners, or employees of private firms.³⁷

As outlined in the previous section, however, each PSI in Alberta has seen grievous cuts to their CAG, and consequently our institutions are less able to support the generation of human capital at the graduate level than ever before. Notably, these cuts occurred at a time where international competition for graduate student talent is rapidly increasing. The US federal government has recently passed two pieces of legislation—the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS)—that both massively increase available funding towards basic and applied research.

The IRA alone authorizes \$783 billion to be spent on energy and climate change research programs,³⁸ while CHIPS includes a total of \$52 billion in direct spending for computer chip manufacturing and semiconductor research.³⁹ Additionally, CHIPS will add \$13 billion in funding for STEM education, “including scholarships, fellowships, and traineeships for graduate students.”⁴⁰

The likely outcome of this influx of investment by the US government is that significantly more researchers will emigrate south of the border; and a great deal of these researchers will be graduate students.

There was already evidence of a leaky PSE pipeline in Canada, relative to the US. In 2021 the Business Council of Alberta noted that, despite similar K-12 education levels, proportionately fewer Canadians receive advanced degrees relative to Americans.⁴¹

This trend is problematic, because as the Fundamental Science Review noted, Canadian universities account for a disproportionately large percentage of Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) relative to the OECD baseline and comparable smaller countries.⁴²

In order of Alberta to be seen as a viable destination for graduate student and researcher talent, our PSI system must offer a competitive advantage for anyone who chooses to study here.

One such method is to create a transparent, dedicated funding stream for graduate students dedicated to supporting graduate-led research. To avoid creating more red tape for institutions, this funding stream could take the form of enrollment grants or scholarships that exist parallel to the CAG funding each institution earmarks for their Faculty of Graduate Studies.

These grants or scholarships could begin at a very basic, universal level to create a funding floor for all graduate students in Alberta. Subsequent grants or scholarships could be merit-based and modelled off the federal Tri-Council (NSERC, SSHRC, and CIHR) scholarships, culminating in a set of research excellence awards for each major field (natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, humanities, health sciences, etc).

In material terms, this would create additional funding opportunities specific to Albertan graduate students while incentivizing research-focused work. In symbolic terms, having dedicated provincial research grants or scholarships would signal to all prospective students that the Albertan PSI system values graduate student research above and beyond basic CAG funding.

Consequently, the Graduate Students’ Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to institute a dedicated graduate student research funding stream in the form of research grants or scholarships, including a universal graduate grant or scholarship for all Albertan graduate students and in addition to merit-based research excellence awards for each major field of study.

Another way of improving Alberta's competitive advantage for graduate students is to reinstate the Alberta Graduate Students Travel Incentive. The Alberta Graduate Students Travel Incentive was originally one of many scholarships made available to students—specifically, in this case, graduate students—by the Government of Alberta. Its purpose was to “support travel related expenses ... for graduate students to participate in academic events such as conferences, contributions (presentations) and research trips” related to a student's research and academic program.⁴³

Students would be eligible for up to \$3,000 in funding, administered through their institution's Enrollment Services, so long as they were a full-time student, attending an event that was directly related to their research and program, and were in good standing with their graduate program.⁴⁴ Students were eligible for one award per year.⁴⁵

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the Travel Incentive program was “suspended until further notice.”⁴⁶ This made sense as provincial public health restrictions inhibited graduate students' conference participation and research-related travel. Of course, those public health restrictions have long since been lifted and graduate students have resumed traveling to academic events. The Travel Incentive, however, has not yet been reinstated by the Ministry of Advanced Education.

The importance of attending conferences cannot be overstated. A study by Campbell et. al. looked at survey data of graduate student experiences with conferences and noted the positive impact conferences had on student attitudes towards their research, long-term academic prospects, and their ability to engage with already established scholars.⁴⁷ A study by Jacobsen et. al. noted that graduate students overwhelmingly saw in-person conferences—and, particularly, conferences requiring travel—as essential for engaging in “an international community of scholars.”⁴⁸

Previous governments have endorsed this argument, as in 2006 the Transforming the Advanced Education System Subcommittee recommended funding supports “for professional development activities, such as conference travel or research development” in order to increase the number of graduate students in the system and meet the province's Innovation, Research, and Technology Framework commitments.⁴⁹

Consequently, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to restore the Alberta Graduate Students Travel Incentive, to provide graduate students additional financial support for conferences and other academic travels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to create an additional funding stream to directly fund graduate student research, in the form of grants and scholarships that:
 1. Create a universal funding floor for all graduate students studying in Alberta;
 2. Create merit-based scholarships with increasing monetary rewards that culminate in a series of research excellence awards, modeled off the federal Tri-Agency graduate scholarships.
- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to restore the Alberta Graduate Student Travel Incentive program

THEME #3: REIMAGINE STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

There are two sources of student financial aid: repayable and non-repayable. Repayable sources of aid require recipients to pay back a portion of their assistance. Non-repayable sources of student aid, by contrast, do not include this requirement.

Student loans are the most common form of repayable financial assistance, as recipients must pay back their loans in regular installments. Students can also be charged interest payments—at either a fixed or variable rate—which accrue until the full value of the loan has been repaid; the interest rate is expressed as the prime rate (i.e., the interest rate that banks charge the most creditworthy customers) plus any addition percentage a province wishes to charge. Six provinces, and the federal government,⁵⁰ do not charge any interest on student loans. Alberta, however, not only charges interest on student loans, but has the highest variable rate (Prime + 1%) and the highest fixed rate (Prime + 2%) in the country.

Relatedly, Albertan students also disproportionately rely on loans as a source of student aid relative to the rest of Canada: according to data collected by Abacus Data, on behalf of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), 12.6% of Albertan students relied on government loans compared to 10% for the national average.⁵¹ This means that Albertan students face higher interest payments on their student loans than students in other provinces and that more Albertan students incur student loan debt than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. Data from Statistics Canada (for government loans only) shows that the average debt level for Albertan Master's students in 2015 was \$28,000, compared to a Canadian average of \$20,000; for doctoral students, the increase was slightly smaller at \$29,000 versus \$26,000.⁵²

Interestingly, the same dataset indicates that average student loan debt decreased slightly between 2010 and 2015 for all Master's students outside of Alberta, while it increased for Albertan Master's students.⁵³

Unlike Master's students, Albertan Doctoral students saw their average debt decrease from 2010 to 2015; however the data also showed that Albertan Doctoral students owed an average of \$44,100 dollars as a result of their student loans, albeit with the caveat that Statistics Canada does not consider that number to be reliable.⁵⁴



The other form of student financial aid—non-repayable grants or scholarships—has not kept pace with growing student demand and system-wide affordability pressures. In the 2021 fiscal year, the Alberta government spent a total of \$172,976,000 on non-repayable financial aid, unadjusted for inflation.⁵⁵ The following year, funding for non-repayable financial aid decreased to a total of \$152,103,000, unadjusted for inflation.⁵⁶ The 2023 fiscal year saw \$161.4 million dollars allocated to non-repayable financial aid, while Budget 2023 promised \$180.8 million.⁵⁷

In nominal terms, Budget 2023 only increased government support for non-repayable student financial aid by \$7.8 million dollars relative to a 2021 baseline, a far smaller increase than tuition levels during that time. This number is, additionally, not adjusted for increased enrollment during that period. When we adjust the numbers for inflation, we find that funding for non-repayable financial aid has actually decreased since 2021. In 2023 dollars,⁵⁸ the 2021 budget for non-repayable student financial aid was approximately \$199.4 million. Budget 2023 thus represents a \$18.6 million cut to non-repayable financial aid.

Again, this number does not account for increases in enrollment during this period, nor does it adjust for increasing tuition since 2021.

Adjusted for inflation, then, the provincial government has cut non-repayable student financial aid between 2021 and 2024, when Budget 2023 will come into effect. They have made these cuts despite the large increases in tuition and mandatory non-instructional fees during that very same period. This is also despite the fact that non-repayable grants and scholarships have an unambiguously positive impact on students. Nguyen et. al. conducted a meta-analysis of 43 studies on the effects of grant aid and found that accessing grant aid improved student persistence and degree completion by 2 to 3 percentage points.⁵⁹

They additionally found that increasing the grant allotment by \$1000 improved persistence and attainment by an additional 1.5 to 2 percentage points.⁶⁰ Importantly, the study's authors adjusted for merit-based forms of grant aid to separate the effects of financial aid that targets high performing students versus financial aid that targets students based on income levels.

They found that merit-based grants had no effect on persistence or completion, and thus recommended that funding agencies prioritize needs-based funding as a means of improving degree completion.⁶¹ These findings echo an earlier meta-analysis specifically analyzing the effects of financial aid on graduate students, where the authors found that grants "in particular offer the greatest bang for the buck among this population."⁶²

By contrast, the literature on student loans is far more ambiguous. While studies tend to find that student loans help degree completion and persistence, the effects (at least for graduate students) do not appear to be as significant as the effect of grants.⁶³

Far more studies find that student debt, which is unavoidable for the vast majority of students taking out loans, carries significant psychological and physiological costs,⁶⁴ especially for students from marginalized backgrounds.⁶⁵

In some professions—such as medicine—high debt levels also decrease academic performance in addition to mental and physical well-being.⁶⁶ As the higher levels of debt reported amongst Albertan students shows, Alberta's PSI system is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of mounting student loan debt; by simultaneously cutting support for non-repayable financial aid, the Albertan government has essentially turned this vulnerability into statutory government policy.

Consequently, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to abolish interest on provincial student loans. This will align Alberta with the majority of provinces and also the federal government, improving the affordability of post-secondary education and enhancing the competitiveness of Alberta's PSI system.

Additionally, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to reverse the cuts made to non-repayable student financial aid. In nominal terms, Budget 2023 increased funding for non-repayable student financial aid by 12%, which the government claimed would help mitigate the ongoing affordability crisis experienced by Albertan university students.⁶⁷ If each provincial budget from 2021 onward increased funding to non-repayable sources of student financial aid by 12%, then Budget 2023 would have earmarked \$243 million for non-repayable grants and scholarships.

We thus call upon the provincial government to dedicate \$243 million for non-repayable grants and scholarship for Budget 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to eliminate interest on provincial student loans.
- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to earmark \$243 million for non-repayable student financial aid in Budget 2024 to address the real cuts in funding for non-repayable financial aid from 2021 to 2023.

**THEME #4: DON'T BLAME
THE WEATHER ON THE
WEATHERMAN: CUT THE
RED TAPE ON POST-
SECONDARY FUNDING**

Two years ago, the Ministry of Advanced Education released their Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs strategy, a comprehensive proposal for reforms of Alberta's post-secondary sector.⁶⁸ Among the major goals of the AB 2030 strategy were "develop skills for jobs," "improve sustainability and affordability," and "strengthen system governance."⁶⁹

One of the mechanisms chosen to facilitate these goals was a move to "performance-based funding" (PBF): essentially, the provincial government would tie operational funding for PSIs to a predetermined set of outcomes.⁷⁰

Institutions that were unable to meet these outcomes would see their funding clawed back. Some of the metrics proposed, and which were eventually implemented after COVID delayed the roll-out of the new funding model, included tying institutional funding to the wages of graduated students and employment outcomes.⁷¹

To quote Alex Usher: "[the government] picked up on an important issue here, but almost certainly chosen the wrong tool to address it."⁷²

Many jurisdictions around the world have some form of outcomes-based funding for PSIs, but the specifics of each system vary. In this sense, Alberta's choice to tie some level of funding to performance-based metrics is in line with other jurisdictions. Two points of caution must be made, though—both of which are noted by Usher in his review of PBF systems for the C.D. Howe Institute.

- The overwhelmingly majority of PBF systems either tie funding to student enrollment and/or competition metrics or research performance.⁷³ In this sense, Alberta (and Ontario) are diverging substantially from the norm by tying employment conditions and wages to institutional funding.
- Usher additionally cautions that most studies on the impact of outcomes-focused funding suffer from methodological errors, and so we do not fully know the impact of PBF funding models even on outcomes like student enrollment and research performance.⁷⁴

The main problem with tying funding to labour market outcomes—and no doubt the main reason why almost no jurisdictions outside of Alberta and Ontario use this metric—is because labour market outcomes are far and away out of a university administration's control. More strongly, labour market outcomes are beyond the control of any singular entity—be it governments, firms, or universities—and so Alberta's PBF model effectively punishes institutions for broad socio-economic trends. It is the equivalent blaming the weatherman for the weather.

Additionally, tying university funding to current labour market trends interferes with any institution that is attempting to be entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship, as Joseph Schumpeter pointed out decades ago, requires taking risks and disrupting the status quo.⁷⁵

Entrepreneurial universities thus should be expected to produce graduates that create new market trends, and accept that this may come at the expense of immediate employment. Punishing institutions for failing to create graduates that conform to today's labour market disincentivizes the very risk-taking processes that drives innovation and entrepreneurship.

One can imagine a feedback loop where funding cuts to an institution inhibits its capacity to create positive economic outcomes, contributing to adverse economic consequences and eventually resulting in further cuts to the institution.

Consequently, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to abolish all performance-based metrics which tie university funding to employment or wage-based outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to end the practice of tying university funding to performance-based metrics such as employment outcomes or graduate wages.

THEME #5: IMPLEMENT A PROVINCE-WIDE EVICTIONS MORATORIUM

Canada is experiencing a housing crisis. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Canada has the third most unaffordable housing among the 38 most developed countries when housing prices are adjusted for average income.⁷⁶ Rent is also no more affordable an option than purchasing a house.

Alberta, as a province, is not immune to high housing costs and rent levels; and indeed, the province's major cities are seeing an influx of homeless encampments as a result of high housing and rental prices.⁷⁷

Calgary, in particular, has seen rent increase far faster than anywhere else in the country,⁷⁸ and the City's 2023 Housing Needs Assessment found that renters would need a before-tax annual income of \$84,000 to afford the average market level of rent, up from \$67,000 in 2022.⁷⁹

Graduate students are particularly vulnerable to being priced out of the rental market—especially when tuition and fees increase at rapid rates—and should not be forgotten about when discussing housing or rental market strategies.

At the same time, the ongoing housing crisis affects so many people from so many walks of life that any proposed housing solution ought to have as broad an impact as possible.

Solving the housing and rental market affordability crisis will be complex as policymakers must balance the interests of multiple stakeholders. We recognize that numerous proposed solutions will need to be considered, evaluated, and carefully implemented.

At the same time, this crisis is negatively impacting people now; waiting too long will cause irreparable harm to numerous lives and could make it all the more difficult to find an efficacious solution in the future.

Consequently, the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary calls upon the provincial government to issue a moratorium on rental evictions for one year, after which we hope that a number of rental affordability-enhancing measures will be in place.

This moratorium is not without precedent: in September 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States implemented a moratorium on tenant evictions. Researchers with the Evictions Lab at Princeton estimates that this stopped 1.55 million evictions during the 11 months it was in place. ^{80,81}

Worries that landlords would be affected by this policy were inconsequential, as foreclosures of rental policies actually went down during the same 11-month period. ⁸²

Evictions universally push tenants into more-and-more dangerous neighbourhoods, where the prospect of lateral economic movement becomes less-and-less likely. ⁸³

An evictions moratorium would mean that Albertans would have breathing room to think about their economic future, rather than worrying about the everyday. It would mean that graduate students could concentrate on their studies and their contributions to innovation in our province, rather than worrying about going homeless.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UCalgary GSA calls upon the Provincial Government to pause all evictions in the province until after the housing crisis has been solved.

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- ⁵ Using <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>, November 2019 to November 2023 CPI. Average inflation during this period 3.87%. Note: Canadian inflation is used rather than Albertan inflation due to the fact that the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) tends to increase at a faster rate than the consumer price index. Canadian CPI thus better reflects inflationary pressure on PSI budgets than the Albertan rate.
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WHO WE ARE

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) of the University of Calgary was established in 1967, and has approximately 8,500 members, including full and part-time Master's and PhD students. A not-for-profit organization governed by UofC graduate students, the GSA is charged with the social, academic and practical well-being and growth of graduate students on campus.

The GSA oversees and promotes workshops, special events, the provision of financial aid and support as well as the facilitation of career-based growth and development for graduate students as they progress through their university programs.

The GSA is governed by a five-person Executive board of full-time graduate students - who are then, in turn, responsible to the Graduate Representative Council (GRC) as a governing and policy-developing body. Over time, the GSA has worked to become a key member of the University of Calgary community via ongoing communication and dialogue with university administrators on pertinent issues.

The GSA represents the collective interests, but not individual opinions, of graduate students to governing bodies of the university, all levels of government and the surrounding community of Calgary.

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