
UCGSA Brief on Program Cost and Comprehensive Advocacy Surveys

March 31st, 2026

Program Cost Survey:

- 483 respondents (out of 7,200 grad students), largely representative of faculty with slight oversampling of international students. MoE +/- 4% 19 times out of 20.
- **50%** said they did not understand the full cost of their program when it came time to pay tuition and **14%** still do not understand, with **59%** of students underestimating the cost of their program and **35%** underestimating by at *least* \$2,000.
- **60%** experienced heightened anxiety and stress as a result and **29%** had to cut essential spending.
- **66%** say they would prepare more financially had they known full cost of program; only **5%** would not have gone to grad school at all.
- Preference for least labour-intensive solutions to problem:
 - **78%** want personalized financial breakdown and 50% want an online financial calculator, vs **26%** wanting budgeting workshops.
 - **38%** say clearer admission letters would be best way to solve problem and **33%** say financial planning tools would be, vs **11%** saying dedicated workshops would be best solution.
 - **61%** say university website and **50%** say admission letters are most effective communications channel, vs **15%** saying info sessions.
- Our interpretation:
 - Most confusion is a result of international students coming from institutions with different norms around tuition (ex: “tuition” including all mandatory fees) and with different policies around how paid employment impacts tuition rates.
 - Domestic students also have an unclear picture of their program costs, though, so lack of information in admission letters is a problem, too.
 - Students still want to study at UCalgary, though, so additional information will not lead to an admission’s exodus.
- Note: FGS and UCGSA jointly hosted a workshop to address many of these concerns, and we have seen positive progress on both the website and admission letters. We believe the university has been an effective partner in helping solve the program cost problem.

Comprehensive Advocacy Survey:

- 469 respondents (out of 7,200 grad students), largely representative by faculty with slight oversampling of international students.

- Overall, students are most happy with institutional level, followed by municipal, provincial, then federal. Federal concerns largely due to role Ottawa plays in research funding and immigration.
- Institutionally focused questions:
 - Students largely happy with UCalgary services, academic programs, and on-campus relationships.
 - Students see low stipends, high tuition, and lack of emergency funding as most pressing concerns.
 - Do not blame UCalgary for lack of research funding; students consider this to be the purview of provincial and federal governments.
- Municipally focused questions:
 - Focus on housing, access to childcare, and food security.
 - Lack of affordable housing and lack of *family* units are largest concerns.
 - Additional concern over distance of affordable units from campus.
 - Childcare access concerns likely impact question on healthcare: students see childcare as part of an essential government service.
 - Most do not face much discrimination in the rental market; largely an issue of supply.
 - Poor quality units also a concern.
 - Not very concerned over transit *affordability*. Care more about transit *availability*, especially at non-peak hours.
 - Not concerned about neighborhood safety and only slightly concerned about transit safety.
- Provincially focused questions:
 - Funding (non-repayable grants, research funding, and funding for course-based students), student loan interest rates, and EDIA rollbacks were the largest concerns.
 - EDIA rollbacks link up with concerns over lack of support for victims of GBV, Indigenous research, and for BIPOC and disabled students on campus.
 - Lack of funding for conferences and field work was another major concern.
 - Lack of university-industry partnerships was major concern, but professional development was not. Suggests students are happy with skills they have learned but want foot in the door for future jobs.
 - Largely happy with free speech on campus.
- Federally focused questions:
 - Research funding and (especially) immigration the largest concerns.
 - International students concerned with almost every aspect of immigration process (delays in approval/processing, fees associated with applications, lack of transparency from IRCC around rule changes, limited pathways to citizenship, etc).

- Research funding concerns include lack of Tri-Council awards, lack of available Mitacs spots, few alternative funding options, and no funding for course-based students.
- More moderate concern was the lack of grad student representation on Tri-Council decision-making bodies.
- Bigger concern: complex CGS application process and lack of feedback on applications.
- Graduate student ineligibility for Canada Student Grants was a major concern.
- Lack of access to EI, pharmacare, and disability support also are major concerns.
- Other moderate concerns: lack of support for interdisciplinary research and lack of support for Indigenous research.