

Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

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Association
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Studies (CAGS)**

CAGS is the leadership organization for the Canadian graduate studies community. The Association represents 47 Canadian universities with graduate programs and includes the three graduate student organizations that together represent over 100,000 Canadian graduate students

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Preparing the Future of Canada: Graduate Education for Innovation and Societal Leadership

The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) shares the government's interest in the future of Canada. This country's national agenda is designed to position it as a leader in technological and social innovation and a global force of economic, social, political and cultural prominence.

Achieving these aims means that this country and its universities must have well supported research and top quality graduate education. Graduate education must be a national priority if we are to fulfill this country's innovation and social aspirations and at the same time replace our numerous retiring university professors.

For this reason, CAGS is deeply appreciative of the Canadian government's investment in research and research students.

CAGS and its member universities are committed to working hand in hand with the government to increase the number of people with graduate degrees by admitting more students, shortening their times to completion, improving their graduation rates and providing them with cutting edge programs that will realize innovative accomplishments. Our goal is to join with the government of Canada in the promotion of top quality graduate education.

Top quality graduate education has certain key elements:

1. ample funding for the number of students being educated so that they can concentrate on their studies and finish their degrees in shorter time periods,
2. high levels of funding for the operating costs of research,
3. excellent research facilities,
4. top quality mentorship,
5. interactions and knowledge exchanges with fellow researchers.



Key Element 1: Ample Funding for Increased Numbers of Graduate Students

CAGS recommends that funding to the federal agencies be increased substantially so that they may fund an increased number of graduate students.

If Canadian universities are to increase their number of graduate students, there must be adequate funding for this increased number of graduate students. Adequate funding is an imperative for graduate students so that they can devote their time and energy to their studies and complete them in a timely manner.

Graduate students receive funding for their research studies from individual fellowships/scholarships such as the Canada Graduate Scholarships and the fellowships awarded to students by the federal research agencies.

For this reason CAGS is especially appreciative of the government's investment in the Canada Graduate Scholarships.

Graduate research students also receive funding from stipends paid to them from the operating costs of research grants and from strategic training initiatives such as the one recently begun by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). These important sources of money for students can be paid to both national and international students. They support graduate student research as part of a team of researchers that can span disciplines as well as universities. Team research involvement has been shown to be an important factor in the timely completion of a graduate degree and in higher rates of graduation.

Despite the recent Canada Graduate Scholarships and increases to the federal research agencies, there is still a very substantial need for increased graduate student funding, especially if universities are to increase the number of students pursuing graduate research degrees. For this reason we consider increases to the federal research agencies extremely important to the education of an increased number of highly qualified personnel.

CAGS recommends asymmetrical funding to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to improve support levels to its graduate students in the interest of improving their graduation rates and times to completion of their degrees.

CAGS recommends that the government mandate and fund SSHRC to undergo a transformation process.

Graduate students in the social sciences and humanities' disciplines have the lowest rates of graduation and the highest times to completion (University Affairs, February 2003). They have the lowest levels of graduate studies' funding in our universities.



For this reason CAGS lauds the government for funding the Canada Graduate Scholarships proportionately to numbers of students in the social sciences and humanities.

However, increased levels of support are still necessary. The expense to the students, their universities and to the country of educating graduate students for as many as ten years without graduating them is enormous. The social innovation agenda of this country cannot be accomplished without increased research support to the SSHRC disciplines so that larger numbers of these students can be funded by SSHRC's master's and doctoral fellowships and with stipends from SSHRC research grants. Better funding will be a major factor in improving their graduation rates and times to completion.

Since academic isolation has also been found to be a major factor in doctoral attrition (Lovitts, 2001, p.39), CAGS encourages the government's support of a transformation of SSHRC. Such a transformation would be likely to create new innovative patterns of doing social science and humanities research and lead to new graduate student team training and mobility initiatives such as the training grants that have been recently implemented by CIHR.

CAGS proposes that the government

- (i) increase the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships, reserving the additional number for international students**
- (ii) permit off-campus employment as well as facilitate employment for international students' spouses on a Canada wide basis**
- (iii) extend the second year of post graduation employment for international students to a Canada wide basis.**

Our nation and our universities have an extraordinary window of opportunity for increasing Canada's number of highly qualified personnel. At this particular moment in history, many prominent American universities are experiencing dramatic declines in the applications and enrollment of international graduate students in their universities. On the other hand, certain Canadian universities have experienced more than double the usual number of international students applying to them in the last two years. Canada should take advantage of the popularity of its universities as a destination of choice for international graduate students.

International graduate students are very important to Canada's new economy and to Canada's special political role in the world. Numerous international graduate students choose to remain in this country after they complete their studies here, thereby augmenting this country's number of highly qualified personnel. Others will return to their home countries and, in doing so, will lead to a world wide exchange of ideas and future international research linkages. International graduate students bring diversity to our universities and society. This is of major political importance at this time in history. Their presence and their education play a major role in promoting strong Canadian values, notably, those of global understanding, global stability and global cooperation. Right



now Canada has proportionally fewer international students than Australia and the United Kingdom.

To take advantage of this exceptional window of opportunity international, graduate students need much better funding. Remember they pay higher fees and have more restricted work possibilities. Yet, the Canada Graduate Scholarships are not available to the best and brightest international students. Their work opportunities are limited to only one year and gaining employment permission for their spouses is an unreasonably laborious process. For these reasons, we recommend increasing the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships and reserving this increase for international students as well as improving employment opportunities for international graduate students and their spouses.

Key Element 2: Ample Research Funding

CAGS recommends that funds to the research councils continue to increase so that there are more operating funds available for professors and their research students so that they can accomplish cutting edge, innovative research.

Increases in funding to the councils benefit graduate students by increasing the amount of operating money available for the cutting edge research of graduate students and their supervisors. In order for Canadian graduate students to be able to do outstanding, ground breaking research, they must have access to appropriate levels of operating research money through their research supervisors' grants. Presently, the average size of a Canadian professor's grant is much smaller than those of research professors in a country like the United States. This lower level of support greatly compromises the level of research possible in Canadian universities which, in turn, compromises the quality of research training and experiences of our graduate students.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously increases to the research agencies will also add to the amount of money available to support graduate students, both national and international, in the form of graduate research student stipends paid from grants. In addition it will support greater numbers of individual graduate fellowships.

In addition, increases to the federal agencies can also support new strategic training grant initiatives that will link students from various Canada's universities in the production of exciting new multidisciplinary research opportunities and provide students with the opportunity to exchange ideas in teams supported by top quality mentors and share in the country's new Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) funded research facilities.



Key Element 3: Well-equipped research facilities

CAGS recommends that the CFI program be continued so that top quality research facilities are available for university research supervisors and their graduate students.

Funds from the Canada Foundation for Innovation have made striking improvement to the quality of Canadian universities' research facilities. These improvements permit Canadian university researchers to help their graduate students to be at the international forefront of research and innovation. CAGS would like to congratulate the government for this initiative and expresses its hope that this form of investment will continue.

CAGS recommends that the government continue to pay indirect cost money to the universities but include graduate student funding in the calculation of the base amounts.

Indirect cost money leads to a direct improvement in university infrastructure. This helps universities provide appropriate facilities and support to the research work of Canadian graduate students. The government should consider the merits of including fellowship/scholarship funding as a part of the calculations for indirect costs since graduate student research is an important component of what the indirect cost payments help universities to support.

Key Element 4: High Quality Research Supervisors

CAGS applauds the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) and their contribution to the high quality education of Canadian graduate student.

CAGS would like to applaud the government for the Canada Research Chairs that have led to the retention and improvement of quality of researchers in Canadian universities. Top quality mentors are helping universities to play their essential role in mentoring graduate students to produce maximally innovative research and to complete their studies in reasonably short periods of time. Having more mentors also means that universities can educate more graduate students.

Key Element 5: Challenging Interactions with Fellow Scientists and Scholars

CAGS urges the government to fund a new "Graduate Student Research Mobility Program" initiative.

Graduate students can have enhanced learning and research opportunities by exchanging ideas with high quality researchers and sharing the well equipped research facilities that exist on our campuses as well as those that exist elsewhere in the world. Canadian graduate students have a greater tendency to go to their local university for graduate studies than their American and European



counterparts do. Canada can model a new initiative for graduate student research mobility on the successful European student mobility program, “Erasmus”. In this way, Canada can build on its CFI and CRC initiatives by encouraging mobility of its graduate research students. Such an initiative will enable Canadian graduate students to visit other universities for a limited time to use their CFI equipment and to profit from another university’s top quality graduate research supervisors. Just as importantly, this initiative will encourage better research linkages among Canadian universities as well as to universities in other countries.



Conclusion

Canada's future and that of its graduate students are highly interconnected.

The people of this country need what the support of high quality graduate education will provide for all of our lives: a country of social and technological innovation and a country of global economic, social, cultural and political leadership.

CAGS would like to thank the Standing Committee on Finance for its support of graduate student research and training. We look forward to a promising future for graduate studies and research in Canada.

