

Faculty Handbook on the Minimum Funding Policy for PhD Students

1. Background

This resource describes the Minimum Funding Policy approved by UBC Okanagan Senate in 2021 and suggests best practices for faculty and graduate support staff in operationalizing this policy.

A minimum funding guarantee helps to attract outstanding PhD students to UBC Okanagan, enhancing our research enterprise and educational goals. Funding has a substantial impact on student satisfaction: PhD students with insufficient funding have longer completion times, greater likelihood of attrition, and lower satisfaction regarding their graduate student experience. In the 2019 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey, 43% of UBC Okanagan PhD students considered financial pressures to be a major obstacle to academic progress. Those who considered finances a major obstacle rated their academic experience more poorly relative to those who did not consider them an obstacle.

2. Eligibility

All full-time PhD students (domestic and international) enrolled at UBC's Okanagan campus will be guaranteed the minimum level of funding for up to the first four years of their program. This applies to all PhD students, including students who fast-tracked from a UBC Master's program. Full-time students can be expected to work at least 40 hours per week on academic activities (e.g., research, coursework, teaching or research assistantships, professional development) related to their studies. The Minimum Funding Policy does not apply to students enrolled in a Part-time PhD Program.

Graduate programs may require students to apply for scholarships to remain eligible for the minimum funding package.

Students are required to make satisfactory academic progress throughout their funding period. (See [UBC Okanagan Academic Calendar](#) for a definition of satisfactory progress.)

3. Amount, Sources and Duration of Funding

The policy ensures that PhD students receive at least \$20,000 for each of the first four years of their program. Funding sources can include any combination of external or internal scholarships, research assistantship, teaching assistantship, or other academically related work at UBC (e.g., Graduate Student Academic Assistantship, lectureships). This four-year period will exclude any official leaves of absence.

Effective September 2023, the value of the minimum funding package will increase to \$22,000 per year. After 2023 the Minimum Funding Policy will be reviewed annually by Graduate Council. Any annual increases will apply to both new and current eligible doctoral students.

4. Coordination of the Minimum Funding Package

It is the responsibility of the graduate program, together with the supervisor, to ensure that doctoral students receive at least the minimum level of funding. Graduate programs are obligated to only admit doctoral students that the graduate program and supervisors have the means to support, considering factors such as support from supervisors' grants, internal and external scholarships, availability of research and teaching assistantships, and financial commitments to existing students. There is much diversity in how students will be funded; some may receive their entire funding package from their supervisor's grant, while others may receive funding from a mix of teaching assistantships, research assistantships, fellowships and/or scholarships.

The graduate program is responsible for tracking and recording the proposed and actual funding for each PhD student over the four years.

5. Communication of the Minimum Funding Policy in the University Offer Letter

Clear communication of funding commitments to admitted students is essential. Appendix 1 outlines standard wording that will be included in all offer letters from the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. Appendix 1 also provides sample text for offer letters that graduate programs may want to incorporate to provide specific details of their funding offers.

6. Sources of Funding for the Minimum Funding Package

As outlined above, the funding package may consist of internal or external awards or scholarships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, graduate academic assistantships, lectureships, or any combination of the above. Other employment in the field of the student's research may be considered part of the funding package, whether the work occurs on or off campus (e.g., a PhD student continues part-time nursing practice to maintain professional skills and to understand current research needs in that setting) (see offer letters in Appendix 1). **The International Four-Year Doctoral Partial Tuition Award (IDPT) does not count towards a student's minimum funding package.**

While internships are not specifically described in the policy, such work is similar to a research assistantship, except for the fact that it usually occurs off-campus.

There are special considerations for teaching assistantships, as outlined below in the BCGEU Okanagan collective agreement. Selection, scheduling and payment of teaching assistantships must adhere to the BCGEU Collective Agreement. Please see <https://hr.ubc.ca/working-ubc/collective-agreements-and-terms-conditions-employment> for full details. If a student declines a teaching assistantship the graduate program is not obligated to replace that funding in order to meet the minimum funding level.

7. Changes in Funding or Student Status

If a student receives additional funding (e.g., from a scholarship) or other income during their program that elevates their package above the minimum, their support from on-campus funding sources may be reduced. Programs are encouraged to develop funding plans to specify how much students will receive if they are awarded scholarships (e.g. Canada Graduate Scholarship – Masters/Doctoral Program, Tri-agency doctoral awards etc). Some reduction in funds from the program/CoGS/supervisor is appropriate for a student who wins a major award, but fairness should be exercised in allowing the student to benefit substantially from the award. Students are required to disclose to the graduate program the sources and amounts of their university or scholarship funding, as well as other relevant income sources, and must inform the program immediately regarding any new funding.

If a student is approved for a leave of absence, their funding will be suspended during the period of the leave. Time on leave does not count toward the 4-year fundable period. If the student completes, withdraws, or transfers out of the program during the period covered by the policy, the support may be subject to repayment or pro-rating to account for the period of non-enrolment.

8. Acceptance Conditional on Funding

In some cases, a program will only accept a student if they are successful in a particular scholarship competition. In this case, the department can inform the student about the conditional acceptance, but state that a formal offer of admission will not be made until the condition has been cleared. Sample wording is provided in Appendix 1.

9. Transfers into the PhD Program

Students transferring from a UBC Master's to PhD program without completing the master's degree will be eligible for the guaranteed minimum package effective the date of transfer to the PhD program. In line with UBC policies, the start of the PhD program for these transfer students will be the date of first registration in the master's program. Therefore, a student who transfers to a PhD after one year of master's study will be provided with at least the minimum package for the next three years.

Students transferring from a PhD program at another university will be guaranteed the minimum funding once they are a UBC PhD student. If their PhD work at their previous university is to be counted toward their UBC PhD program, the duration of their minimum funding package can be reduced accordingly. For example, if the student completed one year of PhD study at another university and that work will be counted toward their UBC PhD program, the student will be guaranteed the minimum funding package for the next three years.

In rare cases, a student may switch from one UBC supervisor and/or UBC Graduate Program to another UBC supervisor and/or UBC Graduate Program. The new supervisor and Graduate Program will be responsible for ensuring that the student continues to be provided with a Minimum Funding Package.

10. Students who do not Receive the Minimum Funding Package

Students who do not receive the funding they anticipated under the minimum funding policy should first discuss this with their supervisor. If the issue is not resolved, they should then speak with their Graduate Program Coordinator. The Graduate Program Coordinator may need to consult with the Department Head or Dean of their Faculty for a solution. If no solution is found, the Graduate Program Coordinator, as well as the student, can consult with the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.

11. Sources to Deal with Unexpected Lapses in Funding

A Minimum Funding Policy requires that graduate programs only admit doctoral students that the graduate program and supervisors have the means to support, considering factors such as support from supervisor's grants, internal and external scholarships, availability of research and teaching assistantships, and financial commitments to existing students. However, it is recognized that unexpected situations can occur. We encourage departments and Faculties to develop their own methods of dealing with emergency funding (e.g., borrowing within a department or Faculty). It is expected that the Graduate Program Coordinator will have consulted with the Department Head and Faculty Dean prior to requesting emergency funding from CoGS. The following emergency mechanisms are available from CoGS, to provide a contingency pool for the graduate program to draw on if necessary:

1) A graduate program can carry forward up to 50% of their most recent base Graduate Student Awards (GSA) allocation (the allocation received from CoGS to be spent as awards) to the next allocation year.

*carry-forwards are not cumulative. The total carry-forward from one year to the next cannot exceed the limits outlined above.

12. Review Procedures

Effective September 2023, the value of the minimum funding package will increase to \$22,000 per year. After 2023 the Minimum Funding Policy will be reviewed annually by Graduate Council. Any annual increases will apply to both new and current eligible doctoral students.

Appendix 1: Sample Offer Letters

The University's offer letter from the Dean, College of Graduate Studies will include the following statement:

All full-time students (domestic and international) admitted to a PhD program of UBC's Okanagan campus receive a minimum level of funding of at least \$20,000 for each of the first four years of their program. The funding package may consist of any combination of external or internal scholarships, research assistantships, teaching assistantships, or income from other academically-related work at UBC (e.g. graduate administrative assistantships, lectureships). Income from other employment in the field of the student's research may be considered part of the funding package, whether the work occurs on or off campus. Students may be required to disclose their sources and amounts of university employment income or scholarship funding, as well as other income sources to the graduate program, and must inform the program immediately of any new or additional funding sources. See [website] for full details.

This would be followed by the graduate program letter which details the specific funding package for that student.

- This letter should come from the graduate program or from both the graduate program and supervisor. The letter should not be solely from the supervisor as the financial package is ultimately the responsibility of the graduate program.
- We recommend that you outline any conditions specific to your program, e.g., the department requires students to apply annually to the SSHRC doctoral competition if they are eligible.
- The letter should specify how you may adjust the award if the student receives additional funding. For example, some departments will reduce the research assistantship income but will allow the student to continue to hold the teaching assistantship.
- It is ideal if the graduate program can outline the specific components of this funding, at least for the first year. However, it is recognized that this may not be possible in some cases due to factors such as late assignment of teaching assistantships, or the unconfirmed nature of student awards or faculty research grants.

Typical graduate program letter samples are outlined below.

1. Mix of teaching assistantship, department award, and grant (with student required to apply to tri-agency competitions)

In recognition of your achievements, we are pleased to ensure that you will receive a four-year funding package of \$25,000 per annum. This package includes a Graduate Dean's Entrance Scholarship worth \$10,000; a research assistantship worth \$10,000; and a teaching assistantship worth \$5,000 for each of the four years. Each year, you will be required to apply for Tri-Agency (NSERC) funding if you are eligible. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship (such as a Killam Scholarship) or external funding (such as a NSERC CGSD), the amount of the research assistantship may be reduced; you will continue to receive the \$10,000 Graduate Dean's Entrance Scholarship and teaching assistantship. If you do not apply for external funding, you may forfeit the remaining research assistantship. We remind you that you must inform XXX immediately of new or additional funding sources that you may receive.

2. International student

In recognition of your achievements, we are pleased to ensure that you will receive a four-year funding package of \$20,000 per annum. This package includes a Graduate Dean's Entrance Scholarship worth \$10,000 and a research assistantship worth \$10,000; in addition to the \$20,000, you will receive the International Four-Year Doctoral Tuition Award to assist with tuition fees (~\$3,900 per annum).

[note: the International Four-Year Doctoral Partial Tuition Award cannot be used a part of the \$20,000 package.]

3. Relevant off-site work – continuing established employment opportunity

We acknowledge that you have requested that income from your part-time employment as a nurse comprise a part of your financial support. Given the important links between this work and your studies, your employment income will be part of your funding package. As you have estimated this work to provide approximately \$15,000 per year, we are supplementing this with a \$5,000 per year research assistantship (for the first four years). If your work and financial situation changes, your department and supervisor will make their best effort to provide a funding package of at least \$20,000 for the first four years, but this may not be possible as funding is pre-planned well in advance. Each year, you will be required to apply for Tri-Agency (e.g., CIHR) funding if you are eligible. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship (such as a Killam Scholarship) or external funding (such as a CIHR CGSD), the amount of the research assistantship may be reduced.

4. Package with award under review

We understand that you have applied for an NSERC Doctoral Scholarship. Should it be awarded, you will receive a total funding package of \$32,000 - \$46,000 per year, consisting of \$21,000 - \$35,000 from NSERC, plus \$11,000 from some combination of research and teaching assistantships and departmental funds. If you are not successful with your NSERC application, you will receive a four-year funding package of \$20,000 per annum. This package includes a research assistantship worth \$10,000; a Graduate Dean's Entrance Scholarship worth \$5,000; and a teaching assistantship worth \$5,000 for each of the four years. You would be responsible for paying tuition fees.

[note: we encourage competitive funding amounts that will help recruit scholarship students; \$20,000 is the minimum, not the benchmark]

5. Undesignated funding package

In recognition of your achievements, we will ensure that you receive a four-year funding package of \$22,000 per year for the first four years of your PhD program. While we cannot specify the exact components of this package yet, the funding package may consist of external awards, scholarships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, graduate administrative assistantships, lectureships, or

any combination of the above. We will ensure that you are made aware of your funding sources well in advance. If at that time, you do not want to take advantage of one or more of the funding sources offered (e.g., you do not wish to be a teaching assistant), you may decline all or part of the package without any prejudice to your ongoing studies. Each year, you may be required to apply for Tri-Agency funding. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship (such as a Killam Scholarship) or external funding (such as a SSHRC CGSD) the amount of the research assistantship may be reduced.

6. Admissions Conditional upon Receipt of Funding (Unofficial Conditional Offers)

Some programs have requested the ability to send out admission offers that are conditional upon funding. Examples of funding required for a full admission offer:

- China Scholarship Council
- Science and Engineering Research Board, India (SERB)
- Tri-Agency Funding
- Funding secured by supervisor

These types of conditional offers will be sent by the program outside of e:Vision and would be considered unofficial offers. Once the program knows the funding outcome, they are required to make a final admission decision through e:Vision. After the final decision is made by the program, the College of Graduate Studies will send out an official admission offer through e:Vision. (Programs must still make final admission recommendations by the deadlines posted on [CoG's Deadlines Database](#).)

Sample Offer Letter Re CSC Doctoral Scholarship

Dear <applicant>,

Thank you for applying for admission to the Graduate Program in XXXXXXXXX at the University of British Columbia. On behalf of the Graduate Admissions Committee, I am pleased to inform you that you have met our admission requirements of academic excellence and English language proficiency.

We understand that you will be applying for a China Scholarship Council doctoral scholarship. It is my pleasure to confirm that we will offer you a PhD graduate student position in the Graduate Program in September 2022, contingent upon you receiving a CSC doctoral scholarship and the approval of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.

Should the CSC provide you with a doctoral scholarship, this letter constitutes a guarantee that the UBC Graduate Program in XXXXXXXXX will provide you with additional salary support to cover your graduate tuition fees and further supplement the CSC doctoral scholarship to an overall level of at least \$20,000 per annum, for four years, so long as you maintain adequate academic progress as stipulated by UBC policy. Should you not be successful in obtaining the CSC scholarship, we will be unable to proceed with this admission.

If your admission is confirmed, it is anticipated that your supervisor will be XXXXXXXX and you will conduct your studies in the general area of XXXXXXXX (research focus).

I wish you success in obtaining the CSC scholarship. Please do inform us immediately regarding the outcome of your CSC application.

Should you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXX