



## **Handbook on the Minimum Funding Policy for PhD Students**

**Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
University of British Columbia**

# Handbook on the Minimum Funding Policy for PhD Students

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Revision 2023-06-29: Removed references to \$18,000 (old minimum funding amount, now \$22,000) in sample offer letter and form.

Revision 2023-12-15: Changed all references of \$22,000 to \$24,000 (new minimum funding amount effective September 2024). Added note that the minimum funding policy is not inclusive of funding that Indigenous students receive from their band or nation.

## Handbook on the Minimum Funding Policy for PhD Students

### Background

This resource describes the Minimum Funding Policy approved by UBC Senate in 2017 and suggests best practices for faculty and graduate support staff in operationalizing this policy.

The Minimum Funding Policy was first implemented in September 2018 at \$18,000. It was amended in January 2021 to raise the minimum from \$18,000 to \$22,000 effective Sept 2021. The Minimum Funding policy has been amended again in December 2023 to reflect the decision by Graduate Council to raise the minimum from \$22,000 to \$24,000 effective Sept 2024. The increase to \$24,000 applies to all eligible students (see below). In the medium term, we hope that the minimum will rise further, perhaps to \$26,000.

It is recognized that PhD students are highly educated individuals who contribute significantly to the research enterprise of the university, as well as to the education of undergraduate students. A minimum funding guarantee sets the floor for financial support to PhD students. It is expected that most PhD students will receive more than the minimum level of funding, as they do currently. The funding package recognizes the important contributions that PhD students make to the university; it also provides a minimum amount for students to cope with living in one of the most expensive cities in Canada and to make the significant time commitment to pursue a dissertation possible.

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 2016 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey, 34% of UBC PhD students considered work or financial commitments to be a major obstacle to academic progress. Those who considered them a major obstacle rated their academic experience more poorly relative to those who did not consider them an obstacle.

The most current policy is documented at the following website:

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/minimum-funding-policy-phd-students>.

UBC-Okanagan has a separate minimum funding policy for PhD students, which can be found at:

<https://gradstudies.ok.ubc.ca/tuition-awards-and-finance/minimum-funding-policy/>.

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### Eligibility

All full-time UBC PhD students (domestic and international) enrolled at UBC's Vancouver campus will be guaranteed the minimum level of funding. This will include newly admitted students and fast-track students 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 or in EdD or DMA programs (see part-time offer letter in Appendix 1).

Students who commenced their PhD studies prior to the initial implementation date (September 1, 2018) are not eligible for the guarantee.

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

Eligibility is contingent on students' satisfactory academic progress (<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/faculty-staff/policies-procedures/academic-progress>).

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### **Amount, Sources and Duration of Funding**

The policy ensures that PhD students receive at least \$24,000 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 leave of absences.

### **Coordination of the Minimum Funding Package**

It is the responsibility of the graduate program to ensure that doctoral students receive 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.

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### **Communication of the Minimum Funding Policy in the University Offer Letter**

Clear communication of funding commitments to admitted students is essential. Students need to be able to rely on these offers to make their (financial) plans for the first four years of PhD study. Appendix 1 outlines standard wording that will be included in all offer letters from the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral 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.

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### **Sources of Funding for the Minimum Funding Package**

As outlined above, the funding package may consist of internal or external awards or [third-party sponsorships](#), teaching assistantships, research assistantships, graduate academic assistantships,

lectureships, or any combination of the above. 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., 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 minimum funding package does not include the International Tuition Award or funding that Indigenous students receive from their band or nation.

The minimum funding package includes the President's Academic Excellence Initiative PhD Award that was launched in Summer 2020. The amount of the award is calculated as a percentage of tuition, so that the amount will vary with tuition. Please see the following website for more information: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/presidents-academic-excellence-initiative-phd-award>.

While internships are not specifically described in the policy, we would consider such work similar to research assistantships, except for the fact that they would generally occur off-campus. As the funding package is a guaranteed package, we emphasize that the supervisor and/or department is responsible for finding and securing the internship opportunities.

There are special considerations for teaching assistantships, as outlined below. Selection, scheduling and payment of teaching assistantships must adhere to the CUPE 2278 Collective Agreement (2014-2019). Some relevant sections on Preferred Candidates for reappointment are extracted below. Please see <https://cupe2278.ca/faq/collective-agreement/> for full details.

#### 13.01c. Preferred Candidates (for reappointment)

Within the guidelines set out in Article 13.01(b), Teaching Assistants eligible for reappointment shall be considered preferred candidates and provided preference for reappointment as follows:

13.01c (ii). Subject to 13.01(b), a full-time graduate student who is registered in a doctoral degree program will be given preference (for reappointment) for consecutive appointments as a graduate Teaching Assistant not to exceed five (5) Teaching Years, subject to maintaining full-time graduate student status.

13.01c (vi). The preference described in Article 13.01 (c)(i) and (c)(ii) above shall be suspended when an employee's level of financial support from a research assistantship, scholarship or fellowship for the ensuing Teaching Year is equal to or greater than his/her salary earned as a member of the bargaining unit in the immediately preceding Teaching Year. Such an employee may be considered for reappointment as a Teaching Assistant in accordance with Article 13.01(b) but he/she shall not have preference for reappointment as outlined in Article 13.01(c). This provision is subject to the maintenance of full-time graduate student status at the University of British Columbia.

Note that according to 13.01c(vi), if a PhD student receives \$6,000 from a teaching assistantship in first year, they would not be a **preferred candidate** in second year if they were to be offered a package consisting of a \$5,000 research assistantship, a \$7,000 scholarship and \$6,000 teaching assistantship in the second year. They can be reappointed as teaching assistants, but they do not have preference for reappointment. There will likely be very few **preferred candidates** in years 1 to 4 of

PhD programs, given that most PhD students will have funding packages from a variety of sources; however, they could be preferred candidates in year 5 if their funding declines at that point.

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### **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. The specifics of this reduction should be detailed in the offer letter (e.g., the departmental grant may be reduced, but not the teaching assistantship). Students may be 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. 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.

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### **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 would not be made until the condition has been removed. Conditional acceptance is available for domestic as well as international students. Sample wording is provided in Appendix 1.

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### **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. Hence, a student who transfers to a PhD after one year of Master's study will be provided with a 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

would be responsible for ensuring that the student continues to be provided with a Minimum Funding Package.

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### **Declining the Minimum Funding Package**

The student may decline all or part of the package after acceptance of admission without any prejudice to his/her admission. For example, a student may decide to decline a teaching assistantship so they have more time to devote to their studies. Where the student declines part or all of the package - either at admission or at any subsequent point throughout their PhD program - the program must submit Form A (in Appendix 2) to G+PS, signed by the student, acknowledging the University has met its obligations and detailing what funding the student has declined and for what period of time. G+PS will track trends in these declines, and will periodically follow up with students to better understand reasons for declining packages.

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### **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 Advisor. The Graduate Program Advisor may need to consult with the Department Head or Dean of their disciplinary Faculty for a solution. If no solution is found, the Graduate Program Advisor, as well as the student, can consult with the Associate Dean, Funding in G+PS.

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### **Sources to Deal with Unexpected Lapses in Funding**

The 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 Advisor will have consulted with the Department Head and disciplinary Faculty Dean prior to requesting emergency funding from G+PS. The following emergency mechanisms are available from G+PS, to provide a contingency pool for the graduate program to fulfill the guarantee of funding to the student:

- 1) A graduate program can carry forward up to 50% of their most recent base GSI allocation (the allocation received from G+PS via their disciplinary Faculty) to the next allocation year
- 2) A graduate program can carry forward up to one 4YF place or 50% of their most recent 4YF allocation, whichever is greater, to the next allocation year.

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

3) A graduate program can borrow against future GSI allocations, up to the amount of their recent base GSI allocation. The borrowed funds will be subtracted from future GSI allocations. Depending on the amount borrowed, the borrowed funds may be recovered over several years' future allocations. Borrowing from future 4YF allocations is not allowed. While borrowing from GSI allocations is possible, it should be deemed a last resort after consulting with the Department Head and Dean, as it may seriously impact other students in the program.

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### **Review Procedures**

The Minimum Funding Policy will be reviewed periodically by the Graduate Council. Any annual increases will apply to both new and current eligible doctoral students.

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## Appendix 1: Samples of Offer Letters

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

**All full-time students (domestic and international) admitted to a PhD program of UBC's Vancouver campus receive a minimum level of funding of at least \$24,000 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). 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 <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/minimum-funding-policy-phd-students> 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 department, 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 is to receive additional funding. For example, some departments will reduce the departmental grant 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 and Faculty-level awards

*In recognition of your achievements, we are pleased to ensure that you will receive a four-year funding package of \$25,900 per annum. This package includes a department fellowship worth \$15,000; a Faculty of Arts Graduate Award worth \$5,000; and a teaching assistantship worth \$5,900 for each of the four years. Each year, you will be required to apply for Tri-Agency (SSHRC) funding if you are eligible. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship (such as an Affiliated Fellowship) or external funding (such as a SSHRC CGSD or Doctoral Fellowship), we will reduce your department grant by the amount of the other funding, to a maximum of \$15,000; you will continue to receive the \$5,000 Faculty of Arts Graduate Award and teaching assistantship. If you do not apply for external funding,*

*you will forfeit the remaining department grant. Finally, as a PhD student, you will be eligible to apply for a conference travel grant. We remind you that you must inform XXX immediately of new or additional funding sources that you may receive.*

## **2. Mix of scholarship and TA-ship for domestic students**

*In recognition of your achievements, we are pleased to provide you a UBC Four Year Fellowship (4YF). This will provide you a four-year funding package of \$18,200 per annum in addition to funds to cover the cost of your tuition. To supplement this, we are able to offer you a teaching assistantship worth \$5,900 and a Department grant of \$2,000 for a total of \$26,100 for each of the four years. Furthermore, your tuition will be covered as part of the 4YF award. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship or external funding, we guarantee that your level of funding will be no less than \$26,100 per year and will continue to provide funds to cover tuition. The one exception is that if your university or external fellowship is \$35,000 or greater, no funds for tuition will be provided. Finally, as a PhD student, you will be eligible to apply for a conference travel grant. We remind you that you must inform XXX immediately of new or additional funding sources that you may receive.*

## **3. International student**

*Our understanding is that you will be receiving \$25,000 per year for four years from the China Scholarship Council (CSC). This income will comprise some of your funding package. In addition, you will receive the International Tuition Award (\$3200/year) to assist with tuition fees. As required by CSC, any additional tuition costs plus an extra \$800 per year for four years will be covered by the department and supervisor.*

[note: the International Tuition Award cannot be used a part of the \$24,000 package. In this case, the student is receiving a greater amount of \$25,000, and thus the \$3200 International Tuition Award is on top of this].

## **4. 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 some of your financial support. Given the important links between this work and your studies, your employment income will be considered to 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 \$9,000 per year department grant (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 \$24,000 for the first four years, but this might 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 an Affiliated Fellowship) or external funding (such as a CIHR CGSD or Doctoral Fellowship), we may reduce your department grant by the amount of the other funding, to a maximum of \$5,000.*

## **5. Relevant off-site work - internship**

*In recognition of your achievements, we will ensure that you receive a four-year funding package worth a minimum \$24,000 per annum. This package includes a department fellowship worth \$10,000 and a teaching assistantship worth \$5,000 for each of the four years. In addition, if you are agreeable, you would have opportunity to participate in an internship coordinated by your supervisor and department which would provide at least an additional \$9000. This internship would be off-campus and we believe would provide valuable industry experience, technical skill training relevant to your research studies, as well as networking opportunities.*

## **6. Package with award under review**

*We understand that you have applied for an NSERC Doctoral Scholarship. Should that be awarded, it would meet the requirements of UBC's minimum funding package. Furthermore, as this is a major award, you would also become a UBC Four Year Fellowship (4YF) holder and in your 4<sup>th</sup> year, you would receive one year of funding at \$18,200 in addition to funds to cover the cost of your tuition in that 4<sup>th</sup> year. If you are not successful with your NSERC application, you will receive a four-year funding package of \$24,000 per annum. This package includes a department grant worth \$10,000; a Faculty of Science Graduate Award worth \$7,000; and a teaching assistantship worth \$7,000 for each of the four years. You would be responsible for paying tuition fees.*

## **7. Undesignated funding package**

*In recognition of your achievements, we will ensure that you receive a four-year funding package of \$24,000 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 departmental grants or 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 will be required to apply for Tri-Agency funding. Should you receive a university-adjudicated fellowship (such as an Affiliated Fellowship) or external funding (such as a SSHRC CGSD or Doctoral Fellowship), we will reduce your departmental grant by the amount of the other funding. Finally, as a PhD student, you will be eligible to apply for a conference travel grant.*

## **8. Admission Conditional on External Funding**

*On behalf of the XX Graduate Program, I am pleased to inform you that we will offer you a PhD student position in the program commencing Sept YYYY contingent upon your receiving a China Scholarship Council (CSC) doctoral scholarship. Should the CSC provide you with a doctoral scholarship, this letter constitutes a guarantee that the UBC XX Graduate Program will provide you with additional financial support to cover your graduate tuition fees and further supplement the CSC doctoral scholarship to an overall level of \$24,000 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. We wish you success in obtaining the CSC scholarship. Please inform us immediately regarding the outcome of your CSC application.*

## **9. Part-time PhD student**

*You have applied for and have been accepted for part-time PhD studies in the XXXX graduate program. You have indicated that you will be continuing your elementary school teaching activities, which will provide you with financial support as well as important links to your doctoral studies. Your faculty supervisor, Dr. X, will be supplementing your teaching salary with a \$5000 per year stipend from her research grant for the first four years. If your work and financial situation changes, your program and supervisor will make their best effort to provide a minimum funding package for the first four years, but this might not be possible as funding is pre-planned well in advance.*

*Students classified as part-time are advised that they:*

- May not be eligible to receive interest-free status government loans, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, student housing, and some fellowships or scholarships*
- Will not receive the minimum funding guarantee for PhD students*
- Are eligible for the UBC Graduate Student Travel Award*
- Are not permitted to switch to full-time registration status*

*Due to Canadian immigration regulations, part-time study has particular implications for international students. International students should seek advice from a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant before pursuing part-time classification*

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## Appendix 2: Form A

### Decline of the Minimum Funding Package for PhD students

All full-time students (domestic and international) admitted to a PhD program of UBC's Vancouver campus receive a minimum level of funding of at least \$24,000 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). Students who decline any or all components of the funding package at any time must complete this form, which requires the signatures of their supervisor and Graduate Program Advisor. The Graduate Program Advisor should file one copy and send one copy to G+PS within two weeks.

I have been offered a minimum funding package and will be declining the following component(s):  
[attach page if more space is required]

Component	Year/Months	Reason
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I acknowledge that the University has met its obligations in terms of offering me a minimum funding package for the time periods specified above. I acknowledge that if my financial situation changes for the time periods specified, my department and supervisor will make their best effort to provide a minimum funding package, but this might not be possible as funding is pre-planned well in advance.

_____	_____	_____
Student Name	Student Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Supervisor Name	Supervisor Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Graduate Advisor Name	Graduate Advisor Signature	Date