

**Members of the University of Calgary Graduate Students' Association Board of Directors  
Submit Letter to University Board of Governors to Voice Opposition To The Tuition  
Increase Proposal.**

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:00 AM MT ON DECEMBER 13, 2019

December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dear Board of Governors,

We - members of the University of Calgary Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Board of Directors - are writing to you in advance of your January 2020 meeting, where you will vote on the University of Calgary's tuition increase proposal, to express graduate students' dismay and opposition to this proposal as it stands. On November 19, 2019 at the Graduate Tuition Townhall, Provost and Vice President Academic, Dr. Dru Marshall, presented a tuition increase proposal that outlined an increased rate of 5% for all continuing students. Graduate students at the University of Calgary strongly oppose this tuition increase proposal, and any proposal that will increase tuition for all continuing students at a rate higher than the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Graduate students do not believe that the tuition increase proposal, as presented, is in the best interest of the university.

Students understand that tuition is critical to the function of the university, and that tuition revenues must be a component of the response to recent provincial post-secondary funding cuts. However, we cannot support this proposal as it stands. From late October to date, GSA representatives have had 10 tuition consultation meetings with the University Administration. The tuition proposal was not shared with us until mid-November. We presented the University with evidence-based alternatives for consideration. We were pleased that the Administration agreed that the tuition increase for current students should not be at 7%. However, our ask was that continuing students' tuition not be increased by more than CPI. We appreciate the University's willingness to be transparent, and the commitment to protect the student experience. However, graduate students want to voice that they have not been fully heard.

Despite the information the GSA has provided to the Administration, graduate students do not believe the Administration fully appreciates the impact that a tuition increase of 5% mid-program would have on continuing students. Current students have budgeted for their entire graduate program and have made major life decisions based on that information— whether it be to forego income from employment or determine ways to support their families during their studies or delay future life decisions. These individuals took the time to do their homework, planned and budgeted to invest in an advanced degree. They will be left scrambling for additional funds to pay for the high tuition increase of 5%. Furthermore, students are also concerned about the possibility of additional tuition increases in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Thus, the true cost to students will be the cumulative tuition increase over the remainder of their program. This increase may result in some students facing delays in completing their degrees or dropping out of their program after years of enrollment. Most students will face financial stress that will affect their

productivity and mental health. This could negatively impact the university through increased costs.

Many graduate students are already in a tough financial situation. This can be evidenced through the increased demand for the SU Campus Food Bank services at the University of Calgary. In 2019, graduate students represented 80% of the Food Bank's clients as compared to 65% the previous year. Students are particularly alarmed that they will have to account for an unplanned multi-year tuition increase while potentially dealing with unchanged minimum funding. This funding is already below the poverty line for many graduate students, and around 40% of it goes towards their tuition. Tuition and fees increase coupled with the higher cost of living in Calgary, will make it very difficult and, in some cases, impossible for graduate students to finish their education.

For you to make a decision that is in the best interest of the University of Calgary, we urge you to take this opportunity to holistically consider all cost reduction levers. Some of these levers include the total compensation package of University of Calgary employees, especially at the top level. This includes exploring what savings can be achieved by bringing the total compensation package in line with the current economic reality all Albertans are facing. For example, this can be done by removing or decreasing employees' benefits of free tuition for a certain number of classes per year, and any other such subsidies that are currently in place. Another lever that can generate substantial value for the University is finding efficiencies within executive compensation. In an environment where everyone is being asked to pay their fair share and have to do with less, the Board of Governors have a duty to explore how to manage executive compensation more effectively and align it with the expectations of Albertans.

In summary, we are asking you for the following:

- To amend the current tuition proposal as to reflect a tuition increase of CPI or no more than 2% for all continuing students.
- To amend the tuition proposal to include provision for needs-based financial support for graduate students.
- To shift priorities within the University's budget by finding efficiencies holistically as noted above.

We would appreciate a response to the specifics raised in this letter. This is an opportunity for the University of Calgary to holistically look at how costs can be reduced without impacting the student experience and the quality of education that we are known for.

Sincerely,



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Note that the Graduate Students' Association President, Mohammad Mansouri, has abstained from signing this letter as he is also a member of the Board of Governors.

About the GSA:

The [Graduate Students' Association \(GSA\)](#) of the University of Calgary was established in 1967, and has approximately 6500 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 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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