Graduate Student Stipends 101... and why we should care!

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Who am I?

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- PhD Student in Biochemistry (Faculty of Medicine, UOttawa)
- President of the BMI Graduate Student Association
- Freelance Science Communicator and Writer
- Chair of the Editorial Committee at the Canadian Science Policy Centre
- NOW the President of the OSPN
What is the Ottawa Science Policy Network?

We are a **graduate student** (soon-to-be) **club** at UOttawa whose goal is to bring awareness to issues surrounding graduate student life and work. Some of our core values include:

- **Funding** for graduate students
- Graduate student **well-being**
- Promoting **EDI** in graduate programs
- Science Policy **education** for science graduate students

How do we do this?

- **Surveys**
- **Advocacy Campaigns**
- **Virtual Events**
Graduate Student Finances

The facts:

Graduate Students typically get their funding through three sources:

1. **Stipends** - Typically awarded to project based Masters/PhD programs, not so much for course based.
   a. **Source**: Can be a fixed salary given by Supervisor, OR through Department as a salary, **TA-ship** or scholarship

2. **Scholarships and Awards** - Includes external funding (Such as NSERC, CIHR or SHERC) or internal funding (financial need based). But can vary from a hundred to thousands of dollars AND are highly competitive!
   a. Depending on the Universities regulations, it is required that these scholarships be used to fund the students stipend, meaning that students with external scholarships are essentially **cheaper** to finance than others.
   b. Smaller internal scholarships typically go directly to the student
   c. Students can also have “top-ups” for getting large external scholarships. This can be an additional amount of money in the form of increased pay or an “Excellence Scholarship”.

3. **Teaching Assistant (TA)-ships** - may be required for stipend, or can be additional income.
Graduate Student Finances

Stipends 101

- Values of stipends vary between universities, and by faculty (as we can see between Faculty of Science and Medicine)

- **Biology Stats:**
  - Minimum Stipend $19,500 for MSc, and $20,500 for PhD
  - Expected to work as a TA
  - Funded for two years for an MSc, 4 years for a PhD, or 5 years for a student who has fast-tracked
  - **Average Tuition Cost:** $9,160.67 CDN

### Income

- $19,500

### Expenses

- **Tuition** = $9,160.67
- **Food** ($200/month \times 12) = $2400
- **Rent** ($1000/month \times 12) = $1200
- **Entertainment/Fitness** ($100/month \times 12) = $1200
- **Transportation** ($100/month \times 12) = $1200

= $15,160

NOT MUCH WIGGLE ROOM HERE!
Graduate Student Finances
Stipends 101

- Tri-Council Scholarships:
  - Fundamental Science Review Post 2018 Election $925M increase in investment to the Tri-Councils
  - Have largely shaped University policies surrounding the “Minimum” stipends for graduate students.
  - Value:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>With inflation, stipend should be now</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters CGS</td>
<td>$17,500/yr</td>
<td>$23,513/yr</td>
<td>$17,500/yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral CGS</td>
<td>$35,000/yr</td>
<td>$47,026/yr</td>
<td>$35,000/yr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ADJUST WITH INFLATION!** This is already done in Australia for example!

**Why isn’t this happening?**
- Most likely to save money - they are making back inflation on every awardee.
- Intermittent awards don’t get as much press

(Khoo, 2020, NSERC, 2020)
Continued increase in applications, and separate data shown a large increase in admissions into graduate level science!
Recommendations in 2019 by Science Policy Exchange:

1. Harmonize all **doctoral scholarships to $35K per year, for 3 years**.
   a. AND Conversely, the “elite” Vanier CGS awards are of $50K per year, which is two-fold the stipend of trainees not funded by CGS programs. Abolishing this award would liberate significant capital towards harmonizing all awards to $35K

2. Harmonize all **Master’s scholarships to $22K, for one year**.

3. **Increase the total number of scholarships** and fellowships awarded to trainees by 25%.
   a. This will account for increase in admission
Graduate Student Finances

Dark Side of Graduate Studies

- This disproportionately affects minorities AND people with dependants who have more costs than single students.
- Failure to secure funding can result in job loss or early graduation, particularly for less privileged students and post-doctoral fellows (PDFs) who already face important barriers.

SO... where are students turning to to survive?

1. **Parents or Family**
2. **Off Campus Jobs**
3. **LOANSSSS**
   a. 45% of graduate students graduate with some form of student debt
   b. Average amount = ~ $33,000 for PhD graduates (Seems low to me?)

NO ONE IS PAYING ATTENTION TO THIS...
Ex. I currently have $100,000 in student debt (5 years undergrad, 4 years of grad school), $60,000 starting salary. Average monthly income in $3,600 (after taxes). ~30% of income will go to paying student loan... for 9.5 years.
What can you do?

Talk about your stipend!

With your Supervisor, lab mates, friends! Educate yourself!
OSPN Graduate Finances Survey

What are we doing about this?

We are launching a National Graduate Student Finance Survey!

Goals:

- Understand variation in student stipends and how this cover the cost of living
- Better understand graduate student debt, loans and financial burden
- Determine how stressful finances are on graduate students and how it affects well-being
- Use this data to generate an advocacy campaign following the upcoming election
Interested in Getting Involved?

Stay in the loop, and keep your eye out for our survey!

You can join our mailing list and learn more about us at ottawasciencepolicynetwork.ca!

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @OttawaSciPolNet!

Interested in joining us as a General Member of OSPN?

Email ottawasciencepolicynetwork@gmail.com to join!