PhD Student
Minimum Funding Guarantee

BACKGROUND PAPER, OPERATING STANDARD, and IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

This document consists of three primary parts. The first is a background paper, which makes the argument for minimum guaranteed funding, beginning with PhD students. It addresses the "why" question in relation to the University's financial obligations to students and its ongoing capacity to recruit the best of them. Consider it a case for investment. The second part is the operating standard through which, we propose, a model of minimum guaranteed funding can be implemented. It addresses part of the "how" question – the administrative form the guarantee will take. The third part presents a two-stage implementation plan, including the financial considerations that will be critical to the implementation of any guarantee.

Note that the proposed figure of $25,000 should be read as a minimum and a place to start. In various consultations with senior leadership, and with students, we have been encouraged to be more ambitious about the minimum. But we have also heard concerns from Faculties, Departments, and Faculty Members on that same point. In that light, the $25,000 figure is meant to strike a balance across a large and diverse University. It is a minimum, not a limit. The same is true for the proposed four-year commitment period. We know that average completion times are closer to six years. Again, what is proposed here is a minimum, not a limit, though it is consistent with the current practices at U15 peer institutions. For programs already guaranteeing the minimum funding proposed here, it is hoped that this initiative will provide them with space to increase this amount, in recognition that it is not enough for most single students to live comfortably on, let alone for those with families.

One final note: this proposal is built on the principle that PhD funding ought to be a matter of shared responsibility between the University, programs, and supervisors; federal and provincial governments; and students themselves. The proposal assumes that the University, in association with peer institutions, will continue to press governments to increase the scale and scope of their support, in ways that could be transformational for Canada's research sector and reverse what has been described in "breaking-point" terms as the loss of a generation.[1] Within that assumption, this proposal represents the University's commitment to do what it can to support the recruitment of exceptional and diverse students, enable them to give primary attention to their doctoral studies, and recognize the valuable contributions they make to the research and learning environment of the University.

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[1] Sparrow McGowan, "Why Canada is losing the next generation of researchers: With support for graduate students at a breaking point, Canadian universities are feeling the impact," *University Affairs*, October 2023.

PART 1: BACKGROUND PAPER

OVERVIEW

The idea of multi-year minimum guaranteed funding for PhD students has a long history at the University of Alberta. It was a key recommendation, for example, in a major review of graduate education completed in 2014,[2] and again in 2023 in the external review of the then - Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research. It has been raised regularly in recent reviews of academic units. In 2018-19, a proposal to establish a minimum guarantee of $18,000 for four years was the subject of wide consultation. Though it did not succeed, many individual faculties and departments across the University now make what are effectively multi-year minimum funding commitments to students at the point of admission. But this is an uneven patchwork, and necessarily a low-profile one, not one that the University can promote.

This proposal builds on the considerable data collection, analysis, and consultation conducted in 2018-19, and on a collaboration with the Graduate Students Association, for which minimum funding continues to be a strategic priority. The primary recommendation in this proposal is that the University move quickly to implement a minimum funding guarantee of **$25,000 per annum for four years to PhD students**; and that it does so with sufficient flexibility and transitional funding to ensure that such a commitment is sustainable and that it does not put undue pressure on any of our existing doctoral programs.

The case for minimum guaranteed PhD funding is more urgent than it was in 2018-19. In the first place, many of our peers in the U15 group – among them, UBC, McGill, Waterloo, Queen's, and Calgary – have already made this step. Others are preparing to do so. Some of those universities are located in provinces like Ontario where public funding formulas count graduate students more favourably (and where institutions have also removed international tuition differentials). The University of Calgary, operating in the same provincial funding context as the University of Alberta, now offers a minimum guarantee of $25,000 across the board, which is among the highest in Canada, and has also introduced a minimum funding guarantee for thesis-based master's students. The effect is that some of our programs risk being increasingly unable to make competitive admissions offers. Indeed, many of our established PhD programs are smaller than they were a decade ago. As we were told, while academic leaders in some of our small PhD programs worry about their ability to make minimum guarantees, they are also aware (1) that they have lost top-priority applicants to

[2] Martin Ferguson-Pell, "Graduate Student Education Initiative: Recommendations for Reform," University of Alberta, June 2014.

other universities that could *guarantee* multi-year funding, and (2) that others – even their own master's graduates – have chosen only to apply to programs whose websites can use such powerfully reassuring language. Needless to say, the quality of our research rests in no small part on the ability to attract the best doctoral students, including Canadian students, who now increasingly look to the United States where programs offer significantly higher funding.[3]

Table 1: Doctoral degree, Fall headcount by Faculty, 2010-2022

Faculty	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
ALES	225	218	246	235	237	230	221	220	214	216	204	201	193
Arts	469	467	472	478	451	413	412	394	385	374	372	353	358
Business	65	54	60	61	51	45	46	49	52	47	49	53	54
Campus Saint-Jean													
Education	274	292	296	291	295	257	246	255	251	255	255	250	230
Engineering	617	669	717	702	711	678	679	709	726	779	783	820	817
Extension													
KSR	66	63	60	65	55	56	49	58	49	50	47	42	41
Law	4	8	8	8	7	7	8	7	5	5	6	5	6
Medicine & Dentistry	282	304	319	316	340	342	329	308	281	291	270	292	300
Native Studies								5	14	15	19	17	20
Nursing	86	74	70	64	68	64	68	66	67	66	73	72	70
Pharmacy	39	35	34	33	32	32	28	23	26	20	18	31	31
Public Health	40	42	42	43	45	50	47	57	46	46	54	60	61
Rehab Medicine	33	34	36	38	36	37	35	45	48	50	49	52	55
Science	707	692	709	686	646	566	564	567	562	584	567	607	641
TOTAL	2907	2952	3069	3020	2974	2777	2732	2763	2726	2798	2766	2855	2877

Source: GPS, Graduate Studies Yearbook: Enrolment Data and Updates

[3] Canada is now a top-five source country for graduate admission at U.S. universities, behind India, China, and South Korea. See the Council of Graduate Schools' most recent report (2023); and the 2023 Open Doors dataset.

In the second place, we know that doctoral students – many with dependents – face increasing financial hardship in the face of the inflationary pressures of recent years.[4] They struggle to afford food and shelter on modest incomes. They pursue PhDs in a funding landscape in which the value and number of federal tri-agency awards have flat-lined for almost two decades; those awards are not available at all to international students. With good reason, doctoral students take on more work, on-campus and off-campus, though it almost always delays completion, and in some cases results in withdrawal from programs. The outdated cost-of-living advice on the GPS website in 2022-23 advised prospective students that they will need $21-28,000 per year as a single person and $49-60,000 for a household of two adults and one child, not including tuition and fees, to live in Edmonton. In this context, a minimum funding guarantee is a matter of ethical obligation to those we admit as well as a critical investment in the research and teaching mission of the University. It is also a practical way to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion within PhD cohorts, since access to funding has been shown to be a significant barrier for those who are less sure that doctoral studies are for people like them. The recommendation made here is a place to start.

This proposal is put together with the understanding that graduate admission is necessarily an exercise in risk assessment. At one level, programs make comparative assessments about particular students, who are educated in universities around the world, and who present a range of GPAs, work/life experiences, and motivations. At another level, programs make decisions about the number of offers to make in a given year, based mainly on available funding and supervisory capacity. In this latter respect, our programs generally have a history of prudent judgment. The intention behind minimum guaranteed funding is *not* to make programs more cautious – to see PhD students increasingly in accounting terms as four-year balance-sheet liabilities. That would be an undesirable outcome. Rather, the intention is to affirm the important role of doctoral students in the research and instructional mission, targets and priorities of the University, to strengthen our capacity to recruit them, and to improve their living standards while they are enrolled in our programs. **For many reasons, this is a time to invest meaningfully in PhD students as an investment in the University.**

Consultations with respect to the current proposal began in December 2022, after then Interim Vice-Provost, Dr. Verna Yiu, challenged the University community to make minimum guaranteed funding for PhD students a matter of priority. Since that time, Departments and

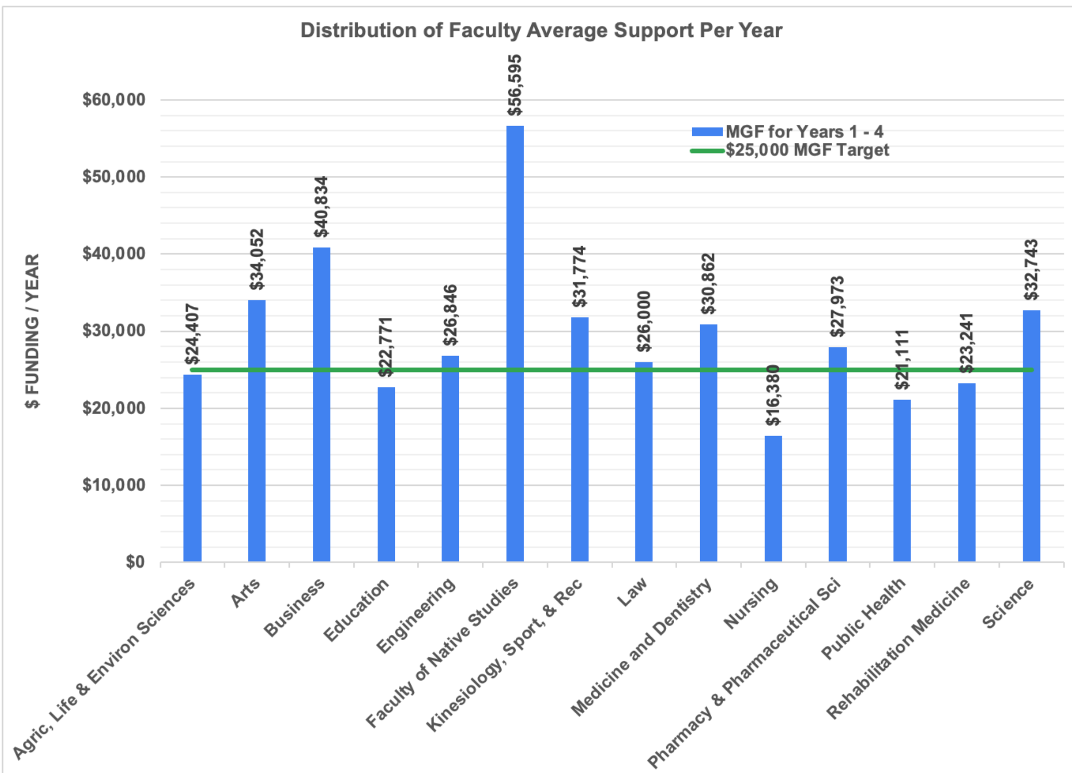
[4] In the triennial Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS), released in early 2023, financial pressures were identified as the most common and significant barrier to academic progress in the subset of 3232 responses from U of A students. See also the comprehensive, Canada-wide analysis by Sarah Laframboise, et al, "Analysis of financial challenges faced by graduate students in Canada," *Biochemistry and Cell Biology* 00 (2023): 1-35.

Faculties were asked to respond to a survey, modified from 2018-19, to help identify funding gaps, contextualize the data, identify their own practices, and register concerns, which largely echoed those expressed in 2018-19. Survey data was cross-checked against what could be drawn from University databases. Comparative data from U15 peer institutions was also gathered, along with interviews with key academic leaders. Also, the subject of minimum guaranteed funding has been the subject of numerous one-on-one meetings within the University of Alberta. It has been an item on several agendas, including that of GPS Council, Dean's Council, the Provost's Advisory Council of Chairs, and GSA Council. Earlier versions of the proposal were also shared with a small cross-University reference group including Vice-Deans, Chairs, and Associate Deans (Graduate) as well as a somewhat broader Implementation Working Group.

KEY FINDINGS

1. As a University, we are much closer than we might think to a minimum guarantee, (Figure 1). More than two-thirds of our PhD students are already funded at levels beyond $25,000 per annum, with formal commitments for four or five years. While averages are deceiving in several ways, average per-student funding from a combination of sources is above $30,000 per annum in several programs; in most others, it is near or above $25,000 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of Faculty Average Support per Year (data for 2021-2022).



Source: Acorn - Graduate Student Financial Support Dataset (GSFS). Prepared by PAIR - Performance, Analytics, Institutional Research (PAIR). Notes:

1. The cohort was selected to align with the focus of the analysis: PhD students in year 1 to 4 of their studies, and only those who were registered full time in both Fall and Winter terms in the U of A Academic Year. The financial support data were based on payments made to students through the U of A payroll systems in the reporting period. The payments not related to their study and research (administrative jobs, casual cleaning job) were excluded.

2. Sponsored students are not identified in the results. They might show as underfunded in this result if they received additional payments such as a TA position. See point 4.a below.

3. ACORN indicates that some departments may deposit tuition fees for students and these payments will not show in this data as payments to the students, but, in fact this pay is would be part of the MFG amount. In some GTA payments, students may opt to have their tuition fee directly deducted from their TA pay. In these cases the remaining balance would be deposited to the students' accounts. Similar to footnote 4 above, these payments will not show in this data as payments to the students, but again would be part of the MFG amount.

2. The total amount of funding for Y1-Y4 PhD students (students that are registered full time in their PhD programs who are between their first and fourth years) that flowed through the University's accounts in 2021-22 – the last year for which we have complete data – was $52.98 million. That amount includes University-administered scholarships and assistantships, as well as provincial, federal, and other external research funding. A pie-chart demonstration of the distribution is provided in Figure 2. The overall number is fairly consistent over the recent years. A more detailed breakdown is provided in the Funding Sources section below.

3. In 2021-22, 630 students – 34 percent of those in Y1-Y4 – were funded at less than $25k. Of that number, 92 received no funding. The total amount that would be required to bring all of those students to $25k is $8,388,865. This is the outer size of the gap. The actual size is much smaller, (see points 4(a) and 4(b) below).

4. Two categories of doctoral students, however, skew any calculation of per-student averages and the overall gap.

(a) First, the University has roughly 300 sponsored international students – 318 in Winter Term 2023 – whose tuition, fees, and living expenses are paid by their home governments or, in a few cases, third parties such as the Fulbright Program. Most are PhD students. Some of them receive no funds through University accounts; others may hold only a periodic TA position, for example, as part of their doctoral training, and so they appear in the data as students with no or limited funding. In practice, sponsored students offset the overall gap by several million dollars, though that offset is not equally distributed across the University. Many of those students are in the Faculty of Engineering (143), with significant numbers in FoMD (29), Science (28), ALES (23), Arts (12) and Pharmacy (12). This proposal assumes that sponsored students will continue to be recruited outside a minimum guaranteed funding commitment so long as their funding meets the threshold.

(b) The second category includes doctoral students who enrol, often as mid-career professionals, in PhD programs such as Nursing, Education, Rehabilitation Medicine, and even Engineering, and who choose to continue to work at least part-time at salaries that outpace any available graduate support. They are, in essence, largely self-funded. For that reason, average per-student funding in Nursing and Education appears somewhat lower. We heard considerable anxiety from these programs that the imposition of an inflexible University-wide commitment to minimum guaranteed funding could actually lead them to admit fewer doctoral students. It is important that this proposal recognize that concern. At the same time, the proposal is clear that in order for doctoral students to remain eligible for guaranteed funding, they must meet a set of expectations: they will be registered full-time; they will submit applications for relevant scholarships; and they will be available for whatever GTA, GRA, or GRAF assignments a program may reasonably make in meeting its commitment to them.

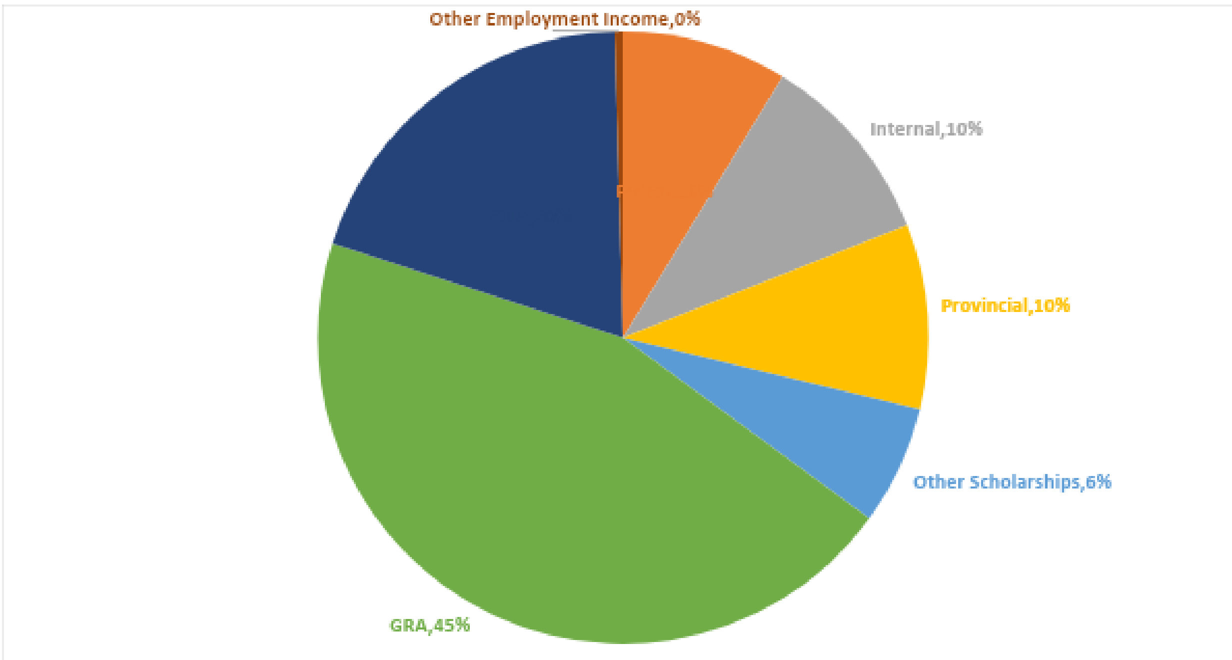
5. In most Faculties, our PhD programs have been sustained by an increase over time in the numbers of international students. On average, and for reasons that may reflect differential tuition and available funding, they tend to finish their programs a half-year sooner than domestic students. That means that in the Y1-Y4 group, their proportion is even higher. International students have access to only some of the sources identified below, and not at all to Tri-Council scholarships. In other words, the imbalance between our numbers of international PhD students and the funding available for them continues to grow. Approximately 42% of our students are international and this guaranteed funding will move us as an institution towards the goal of providing equitable financial support to all PhD students.

6. The University, we think, can reasonably identify sufficient funding to implement a guarantee and maintain PhD enrolment at current levels. In order to grow graduate enrolment, however, including PhD students, it will be necessary to fund those students with new revenue.

7. There is no such thing as a prototypical PhD student. The nature of doctoral research varies considerably, for example, from lab-based disciplines to the humanities. The same is true for funding components and average time to completion. This is the challenge of a University-wide guarantee. When it comes to PhD funding, faculties and departments worry about different things. In programs where students are largely supported from faculty members' research grants, and where admission might be based on a supervisor able to provide funding, the worry lies in making multi-year commitments in a context of grant cycles and uncertain success at renewal time. In addition, we sometimes heard that minimum funding cannot be achieved "on the backs of PIs," who are already under pressure to maintain existing funding levels. In programs that require some of their students to secure Tri-Council doctoral scholarships in order to have the capacity to make commitments to the next cohort, a poor result in a given year will have an impact on admissions.

FUNDING SOURCES

Figure 2: Distribution of financial support for 2021-22 (Total Amount $57 M)



Support for PhD students, as Figure 2 illustrates, comes from a combination of sources.

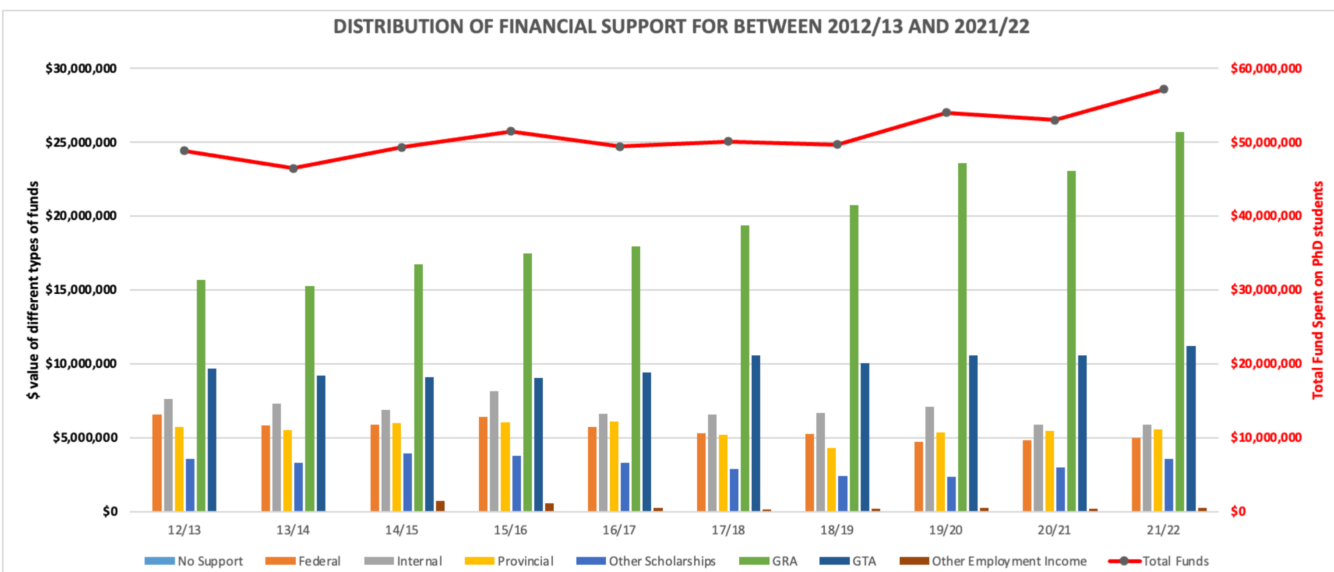
1. The **University's operating budget** provides limited awards funding to doctoral students. That includes $2.5 in recruitment awards, allocated to faculties by a formula (and also intended for Master's students). The amount has not changed in more than a decade. Internal funding also includes top-up tuition awards for PhD and Master's recipients of Tri-Council fellowships, which are not available to international students. In addition, GPS administers a range of endowed and other scholarships, most notably the Killam Fellowships.

2. The other major operational support for doctoral students comes in the form of **graduate teaching assistantships** or, less commonly, primary/sessional instructor positions. These positions are funded from Faculty and Department teaching budgets. In 2022-23 there were 1803 teaching assistantships in the University, with the largest number in Science (702), Engineering (539), and Arts (261).

3. The bulk of the RA support indicated in Figure 2 is provided through Graduate Research Assistantship Fellowships (GRAF), which are funded directly from research grants secured by **faculty members as PIs**. A smaller number of research assistantships are funded from a variety of other available sources. The increase in the total funds provided to PhD students over the last decade is almost entirely related to GRA funds, which show a linear increase from ~$10M to ~$25.6 M.

4. **Provincial support** comes primarily in two envelopes. The first is the Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarships (AGES), in which $7.2 million is allocated within the University, again by formula, and is open to all graduate students. AGES is paid out at $12,000 per annum (this is a University decision; it could be as high as $15,000). Of the total amount, about $1.4 million is targeted to Indigenous students. International students are eligible for a smaller portion. The second envelope is the Alberta Innovates scholarships program, which provides about $3 million in annual support to students in areas that align with designated research priorities. That support is available to international students.

Figure 3: Distribution of financial support from the U of A to the PhD students.



5. **Federal support** flows directly to students who are successful in Tri-Council competitions for the Vanier ($50,000 for up to three years); the Canada Graduate Scholarship ($35,000 for up to three years); or the next tier of multi-year SSHRC and NSERC awards ($20,000 and $21,000 respectively). As is well-known, the overall scale of the federal awards program, funding levels, and rules around eligibility have not been revised significantly for a long time.

LESSONS FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES

1. There is not necessarily an either-or trade-off between PhD enrolment and guaranteed minimum funding. One partial explanation may be that more PhD students help to generate more research funding, which in turn supports more students.
2. The MFG should not be expected to fully cover the cost of living for all PhD students. Such an objective is beyond the capacity of the University alone.
3. The MFG requires a strong institutional commitment. That includes transitional funding and a financial backstop.
4. Regular data collection and periodic review of the minimum guarantee is crucial to safeguard it against cost-of-living increases. To the extent it is possible, methodology for data collection should remain constant in order to be accessible and verifiable, and to enable reliable comparisons year over year. Admission of PhD students in a way that allows sustainable guaranteed funding will necessitate that programs have access to "real time" funding data to enable decisions.
5. Likewise, regular University-wide and program-level review of the impacts of MFG is necessary in order to identify and offset unintended consequences. Some universities reported that smaller departments may have challenges in their ability to offer grad courses if critical mass is lost. Others reported that guaranteed funding for PhD students only might cause departments to meet those commitments at the expense of Master's students, shrinking a good recruiting pool for doctoral students.

PART 2: OPERATING STANDARD

1. Purpose

The purpose of a four-year minimum funding guarantee (MFG) for PhD students is to provide stable funding in order to support the recruitment of exceptional and diverse students, enable them to give primary attention to their doctoral studies, and recognize the valuable contributions they make to the research and learning environment of the University.

2. Scope

This operating standard applies to graduate programs offering PhDs. Programs may elect to expand the scope of the guarantee – for example, to DMus students – but only within the definition offered by the Canada Graduate Scholarship, which treats creative and performance-based outcomes as the equivalent of research.[5] Otherwise, eligibility will not extend to professional doctoral programs beyond the PhD.

3. The Operating Standard

This operating standard recognizes the diversity of PhD programs, available funding streams, and student profiles across the University. It is intended to enable programs to meet a common minimum commitment in ways that are appropriate to them, but within the following parameters:

a. The commitment to minimum guaranteed funding will be made realized formally through the offer of admission letters. Those letters will clearly state the financial terms of each offer and the expectations of students as set out below. GPS will issue offers of admission only when they conform to the terms of this Operating Standard. To that end, programs will be advised to seek approval for template offer letters in advance of annual recruitment. GPS will provide support to programs requiring assistance drafting offer letters that meet the operating standard.

b. The amount of funding guaranteed to a student at the time of admission shall be set initially at not less than $25,000 per annum for four years, or not less than $100,000 over the same time period. Within that total amount, programs may propose an alternative

[5] "An eligible doctoral program must include a significant research component that leads to the completion of a thesis, major research project, dissertation, scholarly publication, performance, recital and/or exhibit that is merit/expert-reviewed at the institutional level as a requirement for completion of the program." Government of Canada, "Canada Graduate Scholarships – Doctoral," at https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/PG-CS/CGSD-BESCD_eng.asp.

distribution across four years – for example, they may choose to “front-load” their funding in years 1-2 – in order to meet recruitment challenges in particular fields. In no case, however, should the amount of funding fall below $25,000 in either years 1 or 2.

c. The minimum funding guaranteed through this operating standard, and any adjustment that is made to the minimum will be applied to all registered, full-time Y1-Y4 students.

d. Programs will meet their funding commitment through any combination of external and internal scholarships, graduate teaching or research assistantships, graduate research assistant fellowships, University-organized internships, and other available funding, including GRA or GTA opportunities elsewhere in the University. The value of external scholarships may be counted towards minimum funding, and must be disclosed by the student.

e. Within the general principle that students who are successful in securing external awards should realize a reasonable net benefit for their efforts, programs have the latitude to set their own rules with respect to the effect of external funding and, in particular, to redistribute funded opportunities within their control (e.g., GTAs, GRAs) to increase the support available for other students.

f. Sponsored students – that is, international students who are fully or partially funded by their governments or other external agencies – may be admitted without an additional funding guarantee, so long as the amount of their sponsorship remains equal to or greater than the minimum set out in this document for the first four years of their studies. At the same time, they should not be excluded from remunerated activities, such as a teaching assistantship, that could be considered part of their overall doctoral training.

g. Funding from a First Nations, Metis or Inuit organization – local, regional, or national – will not be treated as external sponsorship under this Operating Standard. Doctoral students who receive such funding will remain eligible for all forms of financial support at least to the level of the four-year minimum guarantee.

h. Doctoral students will meet a set of expectations to remain eligible for guaranteed funding:

(i) Students must be registered with full-time status, with the exception of Exceptional Leaves, in which case funding is suspended and the time of the leave does not count towards the years of guaranteed funding. Programs may, but are not obligated to, extend the same consideration to students on other approved leaves.

(ii) Students in their second and subsequent years must maintain satisfactory academic standing and be making adequate progress in their program.

(iii) Students are obliged to apply for external and internal scholarships at the direction of their program, and will be actively supported in doing so. This expectation is considered part of students' professional and academic development.

(iv) Students who are assigned GRA or GTA responsibilities must fulfill those employment responsibilities. If they are unavailable, unwilling, or unable to fulfill these responsibilities, their funding may be reduced accordingly and in keeping with the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement.

(v) When students receive GRAF funding that is paid from a faculty member's research grant, they must make adequate progress in research and contribute to the collective research effort. Where students do not meet this expectation, the assessment of research progress should follow procedures set out in the Calendar. Funding should be maintained until a student has been required to withdraw by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

i. Working professionals who will continue to be employed in Canada while they are PhD students (with the possible exception of a leave of absence in their first year of registration), and who therefore will not be available for GTA, GRA, or other assignments that normally constitute part of a program's funding support, may elect either to decline minimum guaranteed funding altogether or to receive it only in their first year of registration, providing that they are otherwise eligible under this Operating Standard. In programs for which this is relevant, the offer letter will include a checkbox to enable students to decline minimum guaranteed funding, or to do so after Y1. When a student declines minimum guaranteed funding, that decision can only be reversed by consent of the program unit.

j. In special circumstances, but only with the approval of the Dean, GPS, a program may recommend that a student be admitted on a self-funded basis. That exceptional approval must be sought prior to the issuance of an offer letter and be stated in that letter.

4. Oversight

The Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies retains administrative oversight of the Operating Standard. That includes responsibilities to:

- issue offer letters;
- disburse any University operating funds made available in support of this commitment;

- ensure compliance, monitor impacts and unintended consequences;
- support the development of data systems to make current-year data available to academic program units to assist in administering minimum guaranteed funding.

GPS retains the authority to withhold and request revision of offers of admission that do not meet the terms of this Operating Standard.

Graduate programs and their respective Departments/Faculties – not individuals PIs – retain final financial responsibility for the commitments made to students under this Operating Standard.

5. Review and Revision

The Operating Standard, including the amount of the minimum funding commitment, may be amended at any time by vote of GPS Council. The Dean of GPS is responsible for ensuring that a review of the Operating Standard is conducted at least every three years, and for proposing a mechanism for such a review to GPS Council for its approval. The terms of any review should include unintended or unanticipated consequences of the minimum funding guarantee.

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION

1. Governance
The proposal for Minimum Guaranteed Funding will be presented to GPS Council for approval in Winter Term 2024. The University has determined that the final decision can be made by Council.

2. Effective date
Minimum Guaranteed Funding will take full effect for Fall 2025 registrations. In the interim, programs are encouraged to review funding commitments for current PhD students and those they will admit in any term prior to Fall 2025 in light of the commitments set out in this Operating Standard and additional resources that will be made available for 2024-25 to support early implementation.

3. Applicability
Given the lead-time, this commitment should apply to all eligible PhD students, Y1-Y4, by Fall 2025. Programs should not reduce support to current graduate students in order to meet their MFG commitments to new students. That said, GPS is willing to show flexibility and work with individual programs to ensure a successful transition to this Operating Standard.

4. Funding
In support of this Operating Standard, GPS will make additional and on-going funds available through the mechanism of what are now called recruitment awards.* Specifically:

(a) Recruitment awards will be renamed *"**University of Alberta Graduate Student Support Awards (GSSAs)**"* and programs will be able to use those award units as they see fit, not only for recruitment, to meet their commitments to students.

(b) The existing 500 units will be allocated by the current formula.

(c) GPS will make available a supplementary allocation of funding units through new commitments that will be distributed in the same manner. This funding will be made available and distributed on the basis of criteria to be developed, though part of the purpose will be to address identified funding gaps, balance across the Tri-Council sectors, encourage an EDI lens on admissions, and ensure that additional funding is available to international students.

A portion of the supplementary units will be made available as early as Fall 2024 but only for programs that have implemented interim measures towards this Operating Standard – and only if the Operating Standard is approved by GPS Council no later than April 30, 2024.

5. Data

The administration of minimum guaranteed funding requires that comprehensive, current-year data be accessible at the program level as soon as possible, but at the latest by Fall 2025.

6. Tuition relief or tuition awards

Between now and the setting of tuition for Fall 2025, further consideration will be given to (a) reducing international PhD tuition or returning a significant portion of the amount over and above domestic tuition – say, $3,000 – as an award; and (b) reducing all tuition beginning in the first registered term after successful completion of the candidacy exam.

7. Master's Support

In implementing this commitment, the University is aware that it must also prepare to implement minimum guaranteed funding for thesis-based Master's students. The tentative date is Fall 2026, subject to approval by GPS Council. The rationale is the same as that stated in the background document: competitive recruitment, an obligation to students, and a recognition of their contribution to the University's research and teaching mission. Masters-level MFG will follow the principles set in the Operating Standard. The initial amount – for one year – will be part of the motion for Council approval.

Appendix A:
Implementation Working Group: Minimum Funding Guarantee
Draft Terms of Reference

Purpose
The Working Group is established to advance the University's commitment to implement an ambitious minimum funding guarantee (MFG), beginning with PhD students, and to do so in a way that is practical, flexible, sustainable, equitable, and expandable for diverse graduate programs.

Terms of Reference
Since December 2022, when the Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) renewed the University's commitment to establish MFG, the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies has engaged in extensive consultations and led in the development a draft Operating Standard with supporting analysis. That draft was presented in June 2023 to Deans' Council and the Provost's Advisory Council of Chairs. It has also been shared with leadership of the Graduate Students Association. In each case, the draft and the principle of MFG received general support; if anything, the response was to be more ambitious for the sake of the University's competitive position and its obligations to graduate students – *if* we can make it work financially.

This Working Group is meant to take up the "how" of a minimum funding guarantee. The scope of its work can be framed in terms of two clusters of questions:

Financial:

- What is the right starting minimum – one that takes into account the realities of our institutional situation but also the need to visibly and meaningfully invest in graduate students and programs?
- How does a minimum funding guarantee intersect with tuition, including international differentials? Is there a better combination of tuition and financial support? Should PhD tuition, for example, be reduced after candidacy, as it once was?
- How do we also plan to extend the minimum guarantee at some level to thesis-based masters students (rather than reduce support to those students to meet commitments to PhD students)?

Data:

- What sort of accessible, current-year data can we generate to make a minimum funding guarantee transparent, sustainable, and simple to administer and monitor?

Timeline

In order to ensure that MFG is in place for recruitment for Fall Term 2024, the model should be ready to implement approximately by November 1, 2023.

Composition

- Adam Gaudry, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Native Studies
- Amy Gao, Director, Strategic Analysis, Performance, Analytics and Institutional Research (PAIR)*
- Cagri Ayranci, Associate Dean, Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (Faculty of Engineering)
- Deborah Williams, Associate Vice-President, Institutional Reporting, and CAO, PAIR*
- Greta Cummings, Dean, Faculty of Nursing
- Gregory Funk, Chair, Department of Physiology; former Associate Dean/Graduate, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry
- Melissa Padfield, Deputy Provost, Students and Enrolment (ex officio)
- Peter Schiavone, Associate Dean/Graduate, Faculty of Engineering
- Roger Epp, Interim Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (Faculty of Arts), Convenor
- Tracy Raivio, Associate Dean/Education, College of Natural and Applied Science (Faculty of Science)
- Victoria Ruetalo, Chair, Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Arts

The Working Group will engage other portfolios and staff resources as need arises.