

Guaranteed Minimum Stipend for Doctoral Students

Policy and Operating Procedures

FINAL - Board of Graduate Studies – March 15, 2005

Background

In Fall 2004, the University of Guelph introduced a guaranteed minimum stipend for doctoral students. This document describes the policy and operating procedures governing the administration of the guaranteed minimum stipend.

Policy

Effective for Fall 2004 admissions, every **new** domestic or international doctoral student must be offered a minimum of \$17,500 per year (including benefits), for a minimum of three years. This amount may come from GRAs, GTAs, GSAs, internal scholarships, external scholarships (e.g., SSRHC, NSERC, CIHR, OGS, OGS-ST) or other similar sources. OSAP support must not form part of the guaranteed stipend. Students may continue to receive the guaranteed stipend for the period of the guarantee, provided that they maintain satisfactory progress, as defined by their academic unit.

This policy does not apply to in-course doctoral students¹, nor to master's students, although the University strongly encourages the establishment of guaranteed stipend levels for all graduate programs.

Operating Procedures

1. Annual Planning for Graduate Enrolment

OCGS requires that graduate programs conduct regular planning for graduate enrolments and report past and projected enrolments on a seven year cycle. In the context of the minimum stipend policy, it will likely be necessary for programs to estimate in advance of admission each year's proposed graduate intake and associated expenditures, so that any funding shortfalls can be identified before offers of admission are made. Ideally, this planning should occur late in the fall semester, with a report to the College dean at the beginning of each winter semester. The report should include each program's proposed enrolment/expenditure plans, the expected recruitment pool, and the academic criteria used in admissions decisions. Normally this planning would be coordinated by the Department Chair or (in the case of interdisciplinary programs) the Program Director.

¹ All but a handful of in-course doctoral students are currently funded at or above \$17,500. The deans and Provost will address the needs of the most seriously under-funded in-program students on a case-by-base basis, in consultation with departmental chairs and graduate coordinators. It may however require several years to bring all in-program students up to the target minimum stipend level, especially in programs where there are many under-funded or unfunded doctoral students.

2. Funding of Program Growth

If a program wishes to increase the number of its graduate students, and requires additional funding to achieve that growth, the Department Chair or Program Director should make that case in the annual enrolment planning submission to the College Dean. The Dean, in consultation with the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Provost, will determine whether or not to support proposed growth with additional funding.

3. The Need for Consistent Funding Practice within a Program

Although individual programs may vary in their approach to funding doctoral students, for instance in the particular mix of GTA vs. GRA funding, it is desirable for all students within a given program to be funded in a comparable manner. Programs may therefore wish to develop guidelines for doctoral funding, to avoid confusion among faculty and students. Typical issues on which programs should provide clear guidance include

- Standard funding duration and amount if the program has a policy to fund students for a longer time or at a higher rate than the minimum guarantee
- Whether the winners of major external awards (e.g., SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR, OGS, OGS-ST, etc.) must be “topped up” above the award level, and if so to what amount².
- Any funding guarantee at the master’s or diploma level

4. Admission of Doctoral Students Without Funding

In rare cases, a program may wish to admit a student who does not require funding, for instance because of employer sponsorship. In such cases, the program should complete the attached waiver request, explaining the reasons for the recommendation and attaching any available documentation of the student’s circumstances. The request must be signed by the applicant, the department chair, and the college dean, and must accompany any recommendation for admission.

5. Funding Offer is Binding

² Generally speaking, the University encourages programs to reward the winners of major external awards with funding that is higher than the minimum guarantee; however this is not always feasible for a given program or discipline. In any case, it is important for faculty and students to have clear guidance as to what minimum level of funding a particular type of award recipient should receive, based on the type of award and any selection criteria established by the department or program. Such funding decisions should be consistent across a department or program, and should not be left solely to the discretion of the student’s advisor.

The funding offer that accompanies an offer of admission constitutes a binding contract between the University and the student. If funds from a particular source are promised in the funding offer, they may not later be revoked if the student is successful in winning a major external award. For example, if a student is promised “One University Graduate Scholarship (\$2000), two GTAs (approx. \$9,000), and a GRA sufficient to bring the total to \$17,500 per year”, that student is entitled to all of that amount, each year, regardless of whether s/he is successful in winning a major external award. In other words, if a source of funding has been promised explicitly in the funding offer, the program may not retract it, even though the student has external funding greater than the minimum stipend. If the departmental or program policy is to cap all doctoral student funding at \$17,500, then the funding offer should say that explicitly, indicating that students who hold major external awards will not be *guaranteed* a GTA, a GRA, or an internal scholarship. All eligible students are of course free to apply for GTA and GSA positions and may hold them if they have the requisite seniority and expertise.

6. Funding Must be Increased to Reflect Any Change in TA Rate

If the value of a teaching assistantship increases during the period of a student’s funding guarantee, the total value of the funding offer must be increased to reflect the change in TA rate. Letter of Understanding #5 of the current Collective Agreement between the University and CUPE 3913 Unit #1 (dated March 5, 2003) states that:

Further to the Collective Agreement between the Canadian Union of Public Employees 3913 Unit #1 and the University of Guelph, it is agreed that should there be a negotiated increase in the full term graduate teaching assistantship wage rate and should an employee be receiving a student stipend (i.e., the financial package arranged for the student), that any negotiated increase in the GTA rate will result in an equal amount increase in the student stipend. However, the University and the Union agree that the Union does not have any jurisdiction over the determination of a student stipend.

7. Funding Guarantee Applies to Students Transferring to Doctoral Programs from Master’s Programs

Students who transfer from master’s to doctoral programs are considered “new” doctoral students, and must therefore be guaranteed the minimum stipend as outlined in the foregoing policy.

GRADUATE PROGRAM SERVICES

Applicant's Surname

Applicant's Given Names

Department/School

Program

Request to Waive Guaranteed Minimum Stipend

The above-named doctoral program has requested that the guaranteed minimum stipend of \$17,500 be waived for the above-named applicant. The reasons for this request are as follows (please attach documentation as appropriate or attach a separate letter):

I understand that by agreeing to this waiver that I waive all rights to future financial support from the University of Guelph for the duration of my doctoral program.

Student Signature

Date

Department Chair or Program Director

Date

Approved: College Dean

Date

Received for Dean of Graduate Studies _____ Date: _____