Dec 12th, 2024, Council Meeting Summary

The council meeting started with a presentation about the [Disability Affinity Program](https://uwaterloo.ca/accessibility/disability-affinity-program) explaining at it does and the services it provides to UW students across campus. The program is a space for University of Waterloo students, staff, and faculty to seek peer support, community, and collaboration. The Disability Affinity Program comprises the Student Disability Community Network, the Employee Disability Community Network, and the Accessibility Ally Network.Council members were encouraged to direct any questions about this program and further inquires to Samantha Fowler.

PhD minimum funding was discussed next with the Speaker providing a quick over overview of current PhD funding and proposed increases to funding from the UW admin side. As of Dec 2024, the current funding for PhD students across the university is ~$9,043 per term. UW admin proposed an increase of 4.5% increasing the minimum funding per term to ~$9,449, an increase of $406 per term. Student representatives at the Graduate Student Relations Committee (GSRC) are actively engaged in negotiations to increase this minimum funding amount as the calculations show that the minimum funding as a % cost of living has been declining in the past years. Current cost of living (COL) expense covered by minimum funding decreased to 65% from 68% the year prior. The year prior was also met with a 4.5% increase. As such, the students are trying to argue that another 4.5% increase is not sufficient if such an increase last year was met with a decrease in how much money this increase covered. The University has stated multiple times across different meetings that it cannot provide a livable wage to PhD students on campus. The council was also informed that in last year’s GSRC meeting (2023), the co-chair at the time verbally made promises to the graduate student representatives that UW would try to cover at least 70% of the cost-of-living expenses in the future years. The current co-chair from UW side has not made such agreements.

Student representatives have tried to better understand the methodology of COL made by the UW side and have raised concerns about their calculations, especially regarding the calculation of low-income cutoff scores (LICO) which are a part of the minimum funding. The university is using an old value from LICO (low-income cut-off data which is collected and calculated by statistics Canada) that they found 10+ years ago and they use 2/3s of this value as the estimate for the living expenses to account for the fact that shelter is already estimated for the region. Over the years the university just took this number from the year before and used CPI (consumer price index, aka the rate of inflation) to adjust the value year over year all they way up to the current cycle of minimum funding discussions.

We asked that the number for the other category should be the most recent LICO number so there is less confusion about where the number comes from and it is more accurate year to year.

Thus, there were 3 sets of recommendations made to council about the proposed increase based on these funding models:

1. a ~21% increase to minimum funding (~$32 938). This would get us 70% of expenses as calculated using updated LICO numbers as requested by the GSA.
2. a ~11% increase to minimum funding (~$30 204). This would get us 70% of expenses as calculated by the university using the old method of using CPI to updated this very old LICO number to the year we are looking at, this would correspond to 64.1% of expected expenses as calculated in option 1 above.
3. a ~10% increase, this is not based on a % of the expected expenses but instead would get minimum funding to a round $30 000 which is just a nice round number and slightly more tolerable on the university side to accept. Again, this would be about 63.8% of expected expenses as calculated in option 1, or a 69.5% of expected expenses as calculated in option 2.

Council voted on the 3rd option and moved to agree to at least a ~10% increase in minimum funding.

Council was also informed that a potential raise this high could lead to reduced graduate student enrollment and other consequences. This was discussed by the council and voted to accept the potential consequences of such an increase in minimum funding.

The President’s nominating committee (PNC) appointments were also discussed during the December meeting with two council members appointed to the position, AJ Fong and Kwaku Owusu Twum.

Following a break, several policy updates were brought to council for feedback (CP 1,2,3,4,5,6, 8, 13). These accounted for updates on language, to clarifying how elections of council members and Council Speaker would take place. CP13, Changing Policies, was also updated to reflect who can change policy and how they can do so (see CP13 for details).

The Exec update included VP Admin informing council of several different programs and surveys in the pipeline for graduate students to look out for. These include safety survey, town and gown committee, and a survey in collaboration with Immigration Partnership that will be launched in March 2025. Council was also informed of the hiring of the Ombuds person and their office will be up and running Jan 2025.

Fee increases of 9% of university housing (CLV) was also brought up to council members as well as the Co-op office proposing a 10% increase in fees for grad students for those in co-op programs.

Adjournment