

## UWaterloo Commitments to Graduate Students

The Graduate Student Association (GSA-UW) represents all graduate students at the University of Waterloo. Over the past few months, we have been engaging with our membership through surveys (e.g., the [Vital Signs Survey and COVID-19 Impact Survey](#)), the GSA-UW Council, and conversations with our fellow graduate students in order to determine the issues impacting their experience at the University of Waterloo.

The GSA-UW has worked collaboratively with Jeff Casello, Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA), and other campus stakeholders to ameliorate problems faced by graduate students. Some of these concerns involve inconsistencies in the delivery of funding support to graduate students for scholarships, TAs, and RAs.

As a result of collective efforts to support GSA-UW members, on June 20, 2020, the Deans' Council has approved several commitments to graduate students.

These commitments pertain to the disbursement of graduate student funding and funding levels, TA/RA-ship payment and time allocations, graduate students acting as sessional instructors, as well as non-financial challenges in graduate student academic programs.

Over the coming months, the GSA-UW will continue to work with GSPA and other campus stakeholders to improve the graduate student experience at the University of Waterloo – and to fully realize the commitments made by the Deans' Council.

The approved commitments are noted below in full.

## UNIVERSITY COMMITMENTS REGARDING EXISTING BUSINESS PRACTICES AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. The University is committed to ensuring that graduate students receive their financial support without delay and consistent with the following schedule of disbursement:
  - a. For TAs, support will be processed monthly, normally beginning at the end of the first month of term;
  - b. For RAs, support will normally be processed not later than the end of the month in which the RA begins;
  - c. For GRSs, support will be processed in full in the first month of term;
  - d. For other awards, disbursement will take place according to the terms of the award;
  - e. In the case where a TA is coupled with another scholarship or award, the TA will be processed as in case a. while the award will be processed as in case d.Moreover, the University is committed to communicating the structure and timing of student support as transparently as possible.
2. The University is committed to ensuring that a graduate student is supported appropriately for the roles they are playing in delivering the University core educational functions. Specifically, if a student is acting as a sessional instructor, the student shall receive at a minimum the sessional rate.
3. The University is aware that in some cases, student support in the first month of term is automatically applied to tuition and fees, leaving a student with no net support for that month. The University is committed to exploring options by which the timing of student support can be coordinated with the charging of tuition and fees to avoid this situation.
4. The University is committed to being actively engaged in supporting students for whom the requirements of their TAs exceed the predefined expectations. Graduate TAs and instructors are encouraged to engage in regular conversations regarding TAs' time allocations and when appropriate, adjust requirements to be respectful of the total expectations. In cases where students and instructors cannot reach a resolution, graduate officers and Faculty Associate Deans are eager to be made aware of TAs' concerns and when appropriate will support students in the achieving a timely resolution.
5. The University has assessed and is committed to continuing to monitor student support levels with special attention to
  - a. Situating the University's funding levels relative to peer institutions;
  - b. Assessing changes in the University's minimum funding levels taking into account students' costs – tuition, fees, shelter and other expenses.
6. In cases where students experience (non-financial) challenges in their academic programs, the University and Faculties are committed to supporting those students through Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA), the Faculties' Associate Deans Graduate Studies, and other offices on campus (e.g., HREI, SSO, Campus Wellness).