

Post-Residency Fees: Towards Accessible Graduate Studies

Introduction

High tuition fees are making it more difficult for many students to enter and complete graduate degrees. With average student debt after the completion of a four-year undergraduate degree topping \$25,000, many students are discouraged from applying to graduate school. For those who do enter graduate studies, financial difficulties are cited as the primary reason for taking longer to complete their programs or for withdrawing entirely¹. The elimination of post-residency fees at some institutions is further reducing the accessibility of graduate programs.

What are Post-Residency Fees?

"Post-residency fees" refers to a fee structure in which graduate students, upon completion of course work, pay reduced fees during the independent research and thesis writing stages of their degrees.

Post-residency fees are known by a number of names that vary from university to university. Terms such as "maintenance", "continuing", "continuance", "post-program", "re-registration", and "additional session" fees are synonymous with post-residency fees.

Why Post-Residency Fees?

Graduate students working on their theses, dissertations, or research papers utilise a smaller amount of university resources. At the same time, during this phase of their studies, graduate students make significant labour and research contributions to the core functions of a university. Reduced fees are a recognition that senior graduate students are a net gain in resources for the institution.

Most importantly, post-residency fees reduce the inequality of access to graduate studies by making graduate education more financially accessible.

The Growing Loss of Post-Residency Fees

During the 1990s, universities in Ontario began eliminating post-residency fee systems. Upper year graduate students at those universities were faced with fee hikes of between 40 and 60 percent when post-residency fees were eliminated at their institutions. Today, tuition fees for graduate students in Ontario are \$8,389 per year on average. By comparison, the average annual tuition fees for graduate students in Québec, where post-residency fees are still offered, are \$1,927.

While most universities in Ontario have abolished post-residency fee systems, many universities in other parts of Canada continue to offer graduate students reduced tuition fees during their post-residency terms.

Consequences Of Higher Fees

A Barrier to Access

Evidence suggests that financial barriers are the main reason for post-secondary graduates not continuing their studies². Undergraduates who complete their program with excessive debt loads, are less likely to consider entering graduate studies if it is going to result in more debt. The lack of post-residency fees increase the potential debt burden facing undergraduate students considering graduate studies.

Quality of Research

Financial hardship also affects the quality of research performed by graduate students. Graduate students under financial stress may shorten their fieldwork, forego publishing and conference presentations, and rush the writing phase of dissertations in order to complete more quickly. Consequently, this has a negative effect on the overall quality of research at universities.

Canadian Universities With Post-Residency Fees

University of Alberta
 University of British Columbia
 Brock University
 University of Calgary
 Concordia University
 Dalhousie University
 Lakehead University
 Laval University
 University of Manitoba
 McGill University
 Memorial University of Newfoundland
 Université de Montréal
 University of New Brunswick
 University of Northern British Columbia
 University of Prince Edward Island
 University of Regina
 University of Saskatchewan
 Simon Fraser University
 University of Victoria

Canadian Universities With Full Tuition Fees For Upper-Year Graduate Students

Carleton University
 University of Guelph
 McMaster University
 Mount Saint Vincent University
 Nova Scotia College of Art & Design
 University of Ottawa
 Queen's University
 University of Toronto
 Trent University
 University of Waterloo
 University of Western Ontario
 Wilfrid Laurier University
 University of Windsor
 York University

Time-to-Completion

Higher tuition fees may force some graduate students to take on additional employment off-campus to finance their education, thereby reducing their available research time and possibly extending time-to-completion. Heavier financial burdens also increase the risk that many graduate students will quit their programs before completion. Higher fees have a greater impact on those with less ability to pay such as international students, students with disabilities, single parents, women, and Aboriginals.

Towards Accessible Graduate Studies

Significant faculty member retirement is anticipated in the next decade³. To attend to this potential shortage, graduate studies will be key to generating qualified young faculty members. Between the labour market shift towards knowledge-based industries and predicted faculty shortages, there will be a need for more than 80,000 graduates from masters and PhD programs before 2011. However, the number of graduate degrees awarded annually in Canada has not increased since the mid 1990s⁴.

Time-to-completion, graduate student funding, and faculty member renewal have been identified as major priorities

Table 1: Sample of Universities with Post-Residency Fee Systems (PRF)

University	Tuition Fees	Post-Residency Fees	Cost of 5-year PhD program	Reduction
Saskatchewan	\$5,313	\$1,459	\$14,973	73%
Calgary	\$4,765	\$1,386	\$13,728	71%
Manitoba	\$4,177	\$674	\$10,376	84%

Table 2: Sample of Universities with No Post-Residency Fee System (PRF)

University	Cost of 5-year PhD program before PR Fees eliminated	Cost of 5-year PhD program today	Increase
Western Ontario	\$11,205	\$25,475	127%
Toronto	\$7,104	\$27,210	283%
Queen's	\$8,400	\$31,500	275%

by organizations such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. For its part, the federal government has set goals to encourage and facilitate enrolment in graduate programs in order to foster university innovation and the dispersion of qualified researchers into the Canadian labour market. The Canadian Graduate Scholarships introduced in 2003 were a positive start to improving access to graduate studies. However, tuition fees continue to soar in most graduate programs, depreciating the value of the Scholarships. The federal government must restore transfer payments to the provinces to greater enable provincial governments and universities to reduce all tuition fees.

1. Canadian Association for Graduate Studies. October 2003. *The Completion of Graduate Studies in Canadian Universities: Report & recommendations*; Pyke, S.W. and P.M. Sheridan. 1993. "Logistic Regression of Graduate Student Retention", *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.23, No.2.
 2. Bowlby, J.W. and K. McMullen. 2002. *At A Crossroads: First results for the 18 to 20 year old cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey*. Statistics Canada.
 3. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. 2002. *Canada's Universities: A strong foundation for innovation*.
 4. Berkowitz, Peggy. 2003. "The Long Haul" *University Affairs*. 8-12.
 5. Canada's Innovation Strategy: <http://innovation.gc.ca>