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The Graduate Students' Association at York University is dismayed by the University of Toronto's decision to charge scholars from other Canadian universities for direct borrowing privileges – \$200 per year, \$130 for six months, \$75 for three months, and \$20 a week. Any fee undermines the shared provincial infrastructure of graduate education. The university's collections are the most comprehensive in Canada, and are a unique and vital National resource that must remain fully accessible. The GSA wonders how this decision advances the University of Toronto's vision “to foster the search for knowledge and understanding in ... the wider community.”

The imposition of any fee on Canada's already struggling graduate student population is unfair. The average student debt upon completion of the PhD is \$42,800. This new fee attempts to levy additional funds from people who sometimes cannot even afford the necessities of life. If the University of Toronto Libraries faces budget difficulties, then it should join graduate students in their own fight for greater public investment in post-secondary education, rather than increase their burden.

The University of Toronto is a publicly funded institution. The Robarts Library, in particular, was founded by the Government of Ontario with the vision of being a resource for the whole province. This goal was reaffirmed just last year, when the Government invested \$15 million in the library to increase student study space, replace some of the concrete walls with windows, add a new wing, and to construct an outdoor amphitheater-like seating area. MPP Laurel Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore) remarked on the importance of this investment: “Given the significant number of users from other institutions and the broader community that use Robarts' resources, this project is an investment in a provincial resource for the future” (Government of Ontario press release, 28 February 2008).

What is more, the renovations' total cost of \$75 million was validated, in part, by a boast about the many visiting scholars who access the Robarts' collections (“Report of the Project Committee for the Robarts Library Renewal and Expansion”, December 10, 2007, pp. 2-3). Not only do the fees bring into question the future validity of this claim, it makes little sense. The university's own statistics show that visiting scholars constitute only 2% of on-site loans and that all direct “use” of the St. George campus libraries has declined over 50% since 2000/2001 (<http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/general-information/about-the-library/annual-statistics>, accessed Sept. 10, 2009). Given the libraries' public funding and the very limited privileges of direct borrowing status, the Administration's argument that visiting Canadian scholars must start paying their fair share is weak at best.

It is exactly in tough economic times that Canada's universities should continue to pool resources. The potentially isolating and alienating path that the University of Toronto plans to take is not in its own best interest, nor in the interests of scholars across the country. The GSA calls on the University of Toronto's administration to reverse its decision and to rejoin other Canadian universities in providing free direct borrower privileges to each other's graduate students, faculty, and staff.

Sincerely,

The Executive of the Graduate Students' Association at York University