



GRADUATE STUDENTS' UNION

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LOCAL 19, CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

Dr. Brian Corman
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
65 St. George Street
Toronto, On
M5S 2Z9

March 9, 2011

Re: Discontinuation of the Doctoral Thesis Completion Grant

Dear Dean Corman,

I am writing you on behalf of the over 14,000 members of the Graduate Students' Union to express our grave concerns over the discontinuation of the Doctoral Thesis Completion Grant (DTCG) and the shift to the Doctoral Completion Award (DCA).

As you know, many of our Course Unions have already passed resolutions condemning the closure of the DTCG, including: Comparative Literature, Geography, Anthropology, History and English. In addition to these, the Graduate Students' Union General Council also passed a motion at our recent meeting on Tuesday, February 15 2011, condemning this change.

While there was uncertainty at SGS and at the Provost's Office about the usefulness of the approximately \$4,000 that the DTCG offered to all students in their 5th- and 6th-years, it has now become apparent through the recent and overwhelming push-back, that graduate students truly relied on this financial aid in order to complete their degrees.

Without proper financial support from the University, graduate students are forced to rely on other sources of funding, such as taking on additional contracts as Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants or Instructors, or even seeking employment outside of the university community. This extra workload undoubtedly slows the progress of personal research and leads to longer times-to-completion.

The shift from a universally available funding source to a competitive, merit-based award alarms the GSU for several reasons. Firstly, by awarding larger sums of money to fewer students, it creates even more of a financial barrier to post-secondary education, and restricts the research questions asked and answered on our campuses to only those who can afford to pay high tuition fees. Secondly, it decreases students' abilities to make long-term financial plans, as students ending their fourth year of study are completely uncertain as to where their funding will be coming from, or how much that funding will be. Thirdly, the competitive DCA will create a favourable situation for a select number of students, while leaving most students in extremely

difficult situations, which further creates funding imbalances already far too common among the university community.

And lastly, we would like to take this opportunity to tie the debate of the DTCG versus the DCA to the chronic under-funding of graduate students, exacerbated by the lack of Post-Residency Fees at the University of Toronto and in the Province of Ontario. Many other provinces have not only recognized – but corrected – the discrepancy between the extremely high rate of tuition and the relatively low resources post-course-work graduate students use at the University.

In fact, the very history of the DTCG highlights the problems of the current tuition/funding situation. As you stated in the SGS Briefing Meeting on March 8, 2011, the DTCG was created by the Provost when the Minimum Funding Package was introduced. We would also like to remind you that this was also the time when the University of Toronto eliminated Post-Residency Fees, thus creating a worse situation than ever before for graduate students at UofT, and thus even more of a need for financial assistance in the post-funded years.

In closing, while we understand that the review of the DTCG was sparked by discussions had between the GSU and the Deans of SGS, we are deeply concerned and frustrated with the inequitable outcome. We hope to continue the dialogue between the GSU and SGS as we move forward to finding the best and most equitable scheme for allocating this fixed pot of \$4 million.

Sincerely

On behalf of the Graduate Students' Union General Council,

Michelle St-Amour
Academic Commissioner

cc'ed: Provost Chreyl Misak, Vice-Provost Jill Matus, Vice-Provost Scott Mabury, Vice-Dean Berry Smith, Vice-Dean Elizabeth Smyth, Vice-Dean Robert Baker, Mr. Gregory West, Mr. Olivier Sorin, Mr. Patrick Vitale