Proposal for a BC Graduate Scholarship

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Executive Summary

A BC Graduate Scholarship constitutes an indispensable investment in maintaining a globally-competitive workforce that can attract entrepreneurial ventures and new production facilities. In the emerging knowledge-driven economy, ensuring access to upskilling and re-training constitutes an essential economic imperative. Graduate students who are well-funded are able to prioritize their research initiatives in ways that are inaccessible to graduate students who must work to finance their degrees. By instituting a BC Graduate Scholarship, the province signals to graduate students, faculty, the work-force and the world that BC values the research and innovation that is spearheaded by graduate students. A provincial graduate scholarship will help attract and keep the world’s best students, train the highly-skilled workers needed to grow BC’s economy, and produce innovative world-class research to meet 21st century challenges.
Introduction

This proposal has been prepared by graduate student leaders from Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, and University of Northern British Columbia. As student leaders at our various institutions, we established an informal network referred to as the BC-GSS and held several “BC-GSS Summits” to discuss our shared external advocacy priorities. From the outset, it was clear that a BC Graduate Scholarship was a priority for graduate students at each of our post-secondary institutions. This proposal represents our initiation of a conversation with the Provincial Government and with our respective universities to create a BC Graduate Scholarship for domestic and international graduate students.

Attracting and retaining the world’s best students

Advanced education is an increasingly competitive and global affair. Graduate students are highly mobile and have many options available to them to pursue advanced research and study. A BC Graduate Scholarship that is available to domestic and international students will help BC become the preferred destination for the world’s best students. Up to 54% of international students who studied at BC post-secondary institutions were interested in working in the Province after graduation, thereby contributing to the vibrancy and innovation of our workforce that ensure we remain globally competitive. Additional, international university students spent nearly $900 million in BC in 2010. Attracting a new generation of international students who will contribute to BC’s economy and may become Canadians is a key strategy for meeting BC’s skilled worker shortage and expanding our businesses and trade relationships abroad.

Ontario, Alberta, and many states in the US have chosen to support students attending their universities with dedicated graduate student scholarships. If we are to remain competitive in attracting and retaining the world’s best students, we need to create an environment in our Province that is conducive to advanced research and study. This includes funding graduate student research as well as considering the impact of graduate students on BC’s broader economic development and job creation strategies. Funding prospective graduate students is an on-going investment that attracts and retains highly qualified researchers and skilled workers while delivering the innovation and competencies needed to grow and diversify our economy. The BC Graduate Scholarship is also a recognition, on behalf of the provincial government and post-secondary institutions, of the high cost of living that students face in many areas of British Columbia.

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students must overcome many obstacles to choose to study in a province with a higher cost of living, and less available sources of funding.

Workforce Training and Economic Development

Strong graduate education and research lays the foundation for solid economic growth in both traditional and emerging sectors. British Columbia’s prosperity in the twenty-first century economy will require a highly-skilled workforce to attract investment and leverage the Province’s competitive advantages. As graduate students are researchers at the forefront of their fields, supporting graduate student education facilitates the innovation and technological development needed to maintain BC as a leader of emerging industries. Natural resource sectors, the historic backbone of BC’s economy, also benefit from research-driven innovations that improve efficiency, productivity and sustainability.

In addition to promoting growth, graduate education promotes stability during economic fluxes. Between 2008 and 2010, during the worse economic downturn in decades, unemployment of those with higher education increased by only by 1.3%, compared to an increase of 3.7% for those without an upper secondary education across OCED countries. In Canada specifically, tertiary graduates had an employment rate that was 26 percentage points higher than their counterparts with only a high school education or lower in 2010. Higher education supports employment even with uncertain labour market conditions.

Given the diversity of ways that both graduate research and professional graduate programs (such as Business and Health Sciences) contribute directly to the BC economy and promote stability, our proposal is that all BC graduate students at approved institutions would be eligible for this scholarship, which would be assessed based on the merits of the applications.

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Supporting World-Class Teaching, Research and Learning

Graduate students serve three crucial roles in the university structure – as teachers, researchers, and learners. In addition to supporting cutting-edge research initiatives, improved funding for graduate students will enhance the quality of teaching as well as increase access to learning opportunities for undergraduate students who attend our institutions. Graduate students who are able to focus on their roles as researchers and teachers contribute to the overall quality of education offered at their universities. Attracting the best graduate students means that universities also benefit from the best teaching assistants, sessional instructors, and peer educators/mentors. Furthermore, by attracting and retaining international students, this scholarship will bring a wide range of traditions, perspectives and backgrounds to our lecture halls and tutorial rooms.

The Proposal Details

We propose a BC Graduate Scholarship through which one thousand (1,000) BC graduate students will receive fifteen thousand dollars ($15,000) per annum. The BC Graduate Scholarship will be dispersed in three installments of five thousand dollars ($5,000), with one installment being received per academic semester. The total costs for providing this scholarship would be divided between the BC Provincial Government (65%) and the individual post-secondary institutions (35%). This funding model is comparable to established provincial graduate student scholarship programs in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Cross-Provincial Scholarship Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Scholarship amount (per academic term)</th>
<th>Total Number of Graduate Students</th>
<th>Number of Scholarships awarded</th>
<th>Percentage of Graduate Students Funded</th>
<th>Annual Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>54,762</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>$45 Million</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$29.25M Provincial (65%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$15.75M institutional (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>16,908</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>$9 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>4,014</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>$2 Million (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>16,772</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>$15 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$9.75M Provincial (65%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$5.25M institutional (35%)</td>
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The BC Graduate Scholarship and Other Funding

The BC Graduate Scholarship will work in tandem with the Tri-Council graduate student awards. The provincial scholarship may be adjudicated along similar parameters to the Tri-Council Awards at the provincial level or may be adjudicated through appropriate structures at the applicable institutions. In keeping with the best practices of other provinces, the BC Graduate Scholarship would not be available in the same year as a graduate student has been granted a Tri-Council Award. Additionally, students who are already receiving an excess of $30,000 from other scholarship sources (including internal funding allocated by their institutions and external funding) would not be eligible for the BC Graduate Scholarship but may be eligible to accept the award in name (without receiving additional funding) or to defer the funding for another year where their total funding amount is less than $30,000.