Beverly Van Ruyven, Chair  
University of Victoria Board of Governors  
C/o Office of the University Secretary  
MWB A138  
University of Victoria

March 11, 2019

Dear Governors,

On behalf of our constituency, the 2,900 graduate students at the University of Victoria, the Graduate Representatives Council would like to share our pressing concerns regarding both the proposed tuition hikes and the decoupling of international student tuition fees that occurred in March of 2017. This letter asks that you vote against increasing graduate student tuition and end the practice of charging international graduate students differential tuition.

**Historical Background and Relevance**

The Graduate Representative Council acknowledges that there exists significant correspondence between the Graduate Students’ Society and the Board of Governors regarding these issues. Rather than repeating this content, we have included the documents submitted to the board from the past two years. We hope that you will review the materials again, or in some cases for the first time, as the research included is still both valid and relevant to the core of this appeal.

In addition to the attached research, and our ongoing opposition to the decoupling of international and domestic fee increase, the Graduate Representative Council has voted this year to formally...
oppose differential tuition for international graduate students. We stand united on this issue, as the representatives of every graduate student at the University of Victoria.

**Forward**

As representatives of all graduate students across this campus and all faculties, we understand that the Board of Governors has a mandate to protect the university and we fervently support that goal. We love our university, and we want to empower you to continue your work to ensure its wellbeing and financial stability. It is because of this that we urge you to consider the lasting and disruptive ramifications that increases in graduate student tuition will have on both the university and its graduate population.

**The Fiduciary Responsibility to Choose Research Over Tuition**

The University of Victoria has a mandate to perform world class research, yet by raising graduate tuition its capacity to perform this research is stymied. As you are undoubtedly aware, a significant proportion of graduate students—and this is especially true for international graduate students—receive their primary funding from the research grants of their supervisors. When tuition fees increase, research grants and other sources of academic funding are not keeping pace and in many cases are becoming smaller or less available on an annual basis. Tuition and research funding are therefore both inexorably linked and diametrically opposed.

Where a students’ tuition is supported by research grants, every dollar earned by raising their tuition is a dollar drained from a research grant that benefits the university and its mandate. Under such circumstances, how can the university expect to maintain its status as a prestigious research institution? Simply put, raising tuition fees may create short-term boost to the university's funding, but will have substantial negative repercussions to the university in the long term. These effects are not abstractions, but a documented series of events backed by studies that consistently show a net loss for universities.

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The Grounds for Dismissing Differentiated Fees

It is the sincere belief of the Graduate Representative Council that differential tuition for international students undermines the university’s status as a world class research institution. We understand the differentiation between domestic and international graduate student to be ultimately harmful to the university’s goals and research mandate.

International graduate students benefit greatly from their time at the University of Victoria, but that cannot overshadow the great benefit the university gains in return. As UVIC’s own 2017 International Plan, *Making a World of Difference*, states, “As we further internationalize our campus and academic environment, we will strengthen international research and graduate education, enhance international academic mobility, identify opportunities for meaningful engagement and build deeper global partnerships”\(^2\). The presence of international students expands on the university’s potential for positive growth through a combination of diversity of opinion, culture, method, and thought. The ability of a university to recruit international students is also key to a strong ranking as a research institution\(^3\). Nearly one in three of our fellow graduate students are designated as international, and both we and the campus are incalculably enriched by the presence of these international peers.

The University of Victoria could not function without its graduate students, and yet rising tuition and tentative funding remain a constant concern. If the Board of Governors votes to increase tuition for international students again, know that this will impact the quality of our lives, mental health, and educational performances. Use of the campus food bank by international students has increased, and that international students are disproportionate users of the service\(^4\).

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International student access to education should never be limited by funding, for both their sake and ours. We urge the Board of Governors to recouple domestic and international tuition increases, and to abolish the differential fees paid by international students.

**In Closing**

We are proud of our university and the work we do here, and want to work with the Board of Governors to maintain a positive, progressive relationship that will mutually benefit all parties. We will continue to ensure open lines of communication and facilitate meaningful consultation with our membership.

We recognize that budgetary constraints are a constant and troubling burden to the university, but the quick-fix solution of raising tuition is a phantasmal solution that: risks jeopardizing our institutional mandate, research quality, and reputation. Your vote today will have a profound and lasting effect on almost three thousand individuals who are united with you in a singular cause: preserving our university’s status as a world class institution and a global leader in research.

Thank you for your consideration.

_Sincerely,_

[Signature]

Arash Isapour
Chair
Friday, March 23, 2018.

Dear Members of the University of Victoria Board of Governors:

I write to you today as the elected Chair of the University of Victoria’s (UVic) graduate students, and on behalf of the Graduate Students’ Society’s (GSS) Executive Board. This letter is to ask you to vote against the 20% tuition increase levelled against the majority of the incoming international undergraduate student body, as proposed for 2018-2019 university budget.

Incongruence with the International Plan
UVic’s International Plan boasts a promising vision for the University, and yet the proposed budget in front of you suggests that this vision is neither just nor equitable. Such tuition increases will disproportionately affect international students who are already at a financial disadvantage, effectively edging out brilliant and diverse minds from our learning environments. Those students who do manage to join us in our labs and classrooms are put at a disadvantage in different ways – for example, added time and stress seeking financial aid and work study jobs in a new and foreign institution, financial burdens that may be related to unexpected health or visa expenses, and loneliness and isolation from communities without the resources to be social. Voting no to these increases is not a vote against the International Plan’s vision for the University; the Plan lists UVic’s achievements, achievements that were met creatively and collaboratively with culturally and financially diverse cohorts of international students.¹ Voting no to these increases will signal a real commitment to the International Plan and a spirit of collaboration in diversity.

Decoupling and Deregulation of Rates of Tuition Increase
Last year, the Board of Governors vote on the budget 1) decoupled international student tuition from the domestically regulated rates of tuition increase, and 2) set in motion a precedent for a 3-5% increase per year on international student tuition. While the increase itself had more immediate effects on international students across the University, the decoupling posed the greatest concern to international graduate students and the GSS.

As stated in the 2017-2018 budget briefing, the GSS was among the groups who received presentations prior to the initial decision to decouple tuition rates. It should be stated that the GSS objected to the decoupling throughout all of these discussions, and we encourage the Board of Governors to refer to our letter from the previous year, which lists our main and ongoing concerns. (Please see the attached letter.)

We have observed how both Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia, schools to which UVic frequently compares and models itself after, respectively increased their international student tuition by 8% per year and 37% over three years,\(^2\) raising concerns about the precedent that they were setting. In other words, the tuition increases seen at SFU and UBC, coupled with the deregulation of tuition at UVic, has made UVic graduate students extremely wary of similar tuition increases. While the majority of graduate students are not facing an excessive deregulated tuition increase this year, the proposed increase our undergraduate peers and counterparts are facing adds to our collective unease and uncertainty.

Actual and Ongoing Consequences
Leading up to this watershed vote, the GSS received a presentation in February 2017 laying out what Phase II of the initial tuition decoupling and increase would involve. Please refer to the presentation slides attached to the end of this letter. It can be seen that the GSS was presented with a methodology for the calculation that would determine the increase in international student tuition. It remains unclear to us how it is possible that this calculation could arrive at an exorbitant 20% increase for international undergraduate students – let alone the additional proposed increases for undergraduate business students, Master of Business Administration, and Master of Global Business students – on the already-higher tuition fee amounts international students must bear.

The Board of Governors’ decision to decouple and increase international student tuition by 4% was accompanied by an informed expectation to see a 10% increase of $50,000 in bursary funding for international students. It was also stated that if the increase to the bursary funding was insufficient, additional funds would be allocated.\(^3\) However, the GSS remains unclear on the status of these additional bursary funds: how much of it was used? What were the qualifying criteria for accessing these funds? Was there a need to increase the fund allocation, and, if so, by how much? Moreover, we have heard testimony from our own members about the difficulties of navigating University channels to access these funds. The ambiguity surrounding the actual funding status, as well as the frustrated student experiences, do not bode well for how the University plans to support such a large number of students under a 20% tuition increase.


Following the initial decoupling and increase, Phase II of the international tuition review was intended to “include discussions around the potential impact of increased fees as well as identifying critical support services,” and that “this process would inform the recommended fees for 2018/19.” The identification of critical support services relied heavily on an online survey circulated to international students last summer, which several students found rightfully insulting following the tuition increase. Given the type of student feedback we received and the recommended fees in front of you, it is the GSS’s impression that the University’s good intentions to consult international students were not serious enough, or some combination of inadequate, insufficient, and all-too infrequent.

Steps Forward
I ask that the Board of Governors vote against the tuition increase, and instead refocus its gaze to look past the vote at solutions that would preserve the real and lived positive contributions that the international student communities bring to this campus. UVic’s Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) process is exciting for many reasons, and my involvement in the process leaves me optimistic that the University will be able to find ways to fulfill its legal budget-balancing obligations without dissuading and penalizing international students financially. As well, UVic is uniquely positioned historically and geographically to speak to a politically friendly government. For example, the provincial government has made headway for UVic by supporting the joint degree program in Canadian Common Law (JD) and Indigenous Legal Orders (JID), and by taking seriously the demand for a provincial graduate scholarship.

Voting against the proposed international student fee increases creates the opportunity for a deeper and more meaningful collaboration between the University and its students. The GSS is prepared and eager to work with UVic and the UVSS in these veins, and many more, to support our undergraduate international students, peers, colleagues, and friends.

Sincerely,

Susan Kim, Chair,
University of Victoria Graduate Students’ Society,
gsschair@uvic.ca.

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4 Dunsdon, J., Simpson, K., & Eder, T. 2017-02-28 GRC Agenda [PowerPoint presentation].
Dear members of the UVIC Board of Governors,

I write to you today as the Chair of UVIC’s Graduate Students’ Society (GSS), representing the over 3000 graduate students enrolled at UVIC, of which 889\(^1\) pay international tuition. On behalf of the GSS Graduate Representative Council, which includes voting members from every academic unit, I am asking you to vote against the decoupling of international and domestic graduate tuition as outlined in the current 2017-2018 budget proposal.

**Context**

In response to chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions by provincial governments, many institutions across the country continue to turn to tuition fees to cover operating expenses. Given the provincial cap on increases to domestic tuition, and the minimal political influences held by international students in Canada, international students have become an important source of revenue at many post-secondary institutions across the country\(^2\). While other institutions in BC have opted to deregulate international tuition entirely, resulting in huge tuition increases for international students\(^3\), other institutions, including UVIC, have opted for a different strategy: Increasing the ratio of international students to account for budgetary deficits. This strategy allowed for $3.1M of additional revenue from student fees for UVIC in 2015-2016 alone.

While budgetary constraints continue to be of real concern and that international enrolment cannot continue to grow indefinitely, the decision to move away from coupled rate increases for domestic and international tuition represents a substantial shift in UVIC’s budgetary policy. Of critical importance prior to implementation of such a decision is the assessment of how students will respond to the tuition changes\(^4\). It is our opinion that such an assessment has not yet been made, leaving UVIC vulnerable to significant perverse effects should this decision be made hastily.

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\(^{1}\) Numbers based on 2015 enrollment. UVic International Plan: Making a World of Difference 2017-2022


\(^{3}\) International tuition increases of 46.8% over the next three years announced. *The Ubyssey*. [http://www.ubyssey.ca/news/tuition-increases-announced/](http://www.ubyssey.ca/news/tuition-increases-announced/)

Will the proposed changes result in increased revenue?
According to the data provided to us by UVIC administration\(^5\), the proposed increases of 1-3% percent (above the planned 2% increase), represent an average increase to international tuition of $22 to $66 per term. Based on our recent enrollment data, increases to international graduate tuition may therefore represent 58 to 176 thousand dollars of additional revenue annually.

In the context of UVIC’s general operating revenue, this represents a very small budgetary increase (0.01%-0.05%). However the implications on graduate student funding may be significant. Several members of the UVIC administration have suggested increases to bursary funds as a tactic to mitigate impact\(^6\). Should increased bursary funds be necessary, it is unclear to what extent the proposed tuition increases will result in additional revenue.

What are the implications for current and future international graduate students?
The next question which must be addressed is whether international graduate students currently studying at UVIC can afford the proposed cost increases. Through discussions with UVIC administrators and faculty members, it is clear that the proposed additional 1-3% increases in tuition costs were not thought to be of significant financial significance for graduate students. As such, no consultation process was undertaken related to the proposal for increasing international tuition as found in the 2017-2018 budget\(^7\).

This may be due to assumptions that all international students as being bankrolled by wealthy families, or funded by foreign governments. Such assumptions are not supported by recent data, and do not accurately represent international graduate students in North America or at UVIC. Recent data collected from over 380 thousand international graduate students in the United States revealed that only 5% were government funded, while over 30% were primarily funded by the institution, including teaching and research assistantships\(^8\).

While no such data exists for UVIC, our consultation with international graduate students has revealed that many are funded through research and teaching assistantships, UVIC scholarships, bursaries and by personal savings and loans. Based on available data from the campus food bank, such funding models may already be insufficient to adequately fund graduate students, both international and domestic. In 2015, graduate students made 1367 visits to the UVSS food bank, accounting for 26.4% of all visits, with domestic and international students experiencing similar usage rates. This is inconsistent with the perceived notion of international student wealth.

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\(^5\) Minutes from the February 28\(^{th}\), 2017 meeting of the Graduate Representative Council. UVIC Graduate Students’ Society. Presentation by Jim Dunsdon, Kristi Simpson and Tony Edar.

\(^6\) Personal notes — Graduate Executive Council meeting, Monday March 6\(^{th}\), 2017. Presentation by Jim Dunsdon and Tony Edar.

\(^7\) Minutes from the February 28\(^{th}\), 2017 meeting of the Graduate Representative Council. UVIC Graduate Students’ Society. Presentation by Jim Dunsdon, Kristi Simpson and Tony Edar.

Unfortunately, with the graduate bursary funding overextended, few available teaching assistantships in many departments, and graduate stipends which remain largely fixed is it unclear how international graduate students will pay for increases in tuition. Graduate students may have to explore additional funding sources, which may have unintended consequences on the number of full-time enrolled graduate students, graduate student completion times, and allocation of faculty member-held research grant funds.

Increased financial strain may also impact international graduate students' mental health. With 54.9% of graduate students reporting having experienced overwhelming anxiety, and 29.7% of graduate students already stating finances as being very difficult or traumatic to handle\(^9\), the effects of increasing tuition on student success, and the potential for further strain on campus counselling resources must also be considered.

Finally, UVIC's capacity to recruit international students in the future must be assessed. Over the last year, despite higher graduate application rates, graduate enrollment has stabilized or even moderately decreased\(^10\). The impacts of decoupling tuition rates on recruitment may have the perverse effects of decreasing tuition revenue overall. This is especially precarious given the high degree of importance assigned to *affordability of tuition* by international students when choosing a Canadian graduate school\(^11\).

In order to ensure the continued success of international graduate students, and ensure continued recruitment of excellent international graduate students, further research will be required. Research will have to include a proper assessment of graduate student financial difficulties, and extensive consultations with international graduate students. In the 2016-2017 budget framework the importance of such research was outlined as the first step towards tuition increases\(^12\), however to our knowledge it has not yet been conducted.

**What are the implications on UVIC's reputation?**

UVIC has dedicated significant resources in the last several years to increase its international reputation as a research university. This has included the development of UVIC's first Internationalization Plan\(^13\), the development of the 2016-2021 Strategic Research Plan\(^14\), and most recently strong statements in support of international students affected by the US executive orders\(^15\). Of note, the International Plan, the Strategic Research Plan and even the 2016-2017 budget framework\(^6\) have all highlighted the

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\(^10\) UVIC Graduate Students' Society 2016-2017 Budget.


\(^12\) https://www.uvic.ca/financialplanning/assets/docs/PlanningBudgetFramework2016_17.pdf

\(^13\) http://www.uvic.ca/assets2012/docs/international-plan.pdf


\(^15\) http://www.uvic.ca/info/president/statements/quebec-us-order-30jan2017.php
importance of graduate students as a strategic focus for the university, and have named graduate students as the primary contributors to academic research at UVIC.

Under the previous funding model, during a period of significant growth for the international graduate student population, UVIC has experienced unprecedented growth in its research capacity and reputation. UVIC’s recognition in international university rankings has improved consistently over the last decade, and in 2015 UVIC ranked 1st for the highest proportion of internationally co-authored research of any university in Canada\(^7\). Faculties with large international graduate enrollment have especially benefitted: in 2015 UVIC science and engineering were ranked first overall in Canada for universities without a medical school, and the Leiden (bibliometric) rankings placed UVIC first in the fields of mathematics and computer science, and physical sciences and engineering.

Given the demonstrated success over the last decade in international graduate student recruitment and research, it is unclear why an alternate model is now being considered. Additionally, given the current political climate, such a decision at this time may send mixed messages to as to the welcoming and accepting nature of UVIC’s community.

**What are the implications on UVIC’s research capacities?**

In addition to the potential effects of such a change on UVIC’s research reputation, the proposed decoupling of domestic and international tuition may have much more direct implications on UVIC’s research capabilities.

In many faculties, graduate students’ primary income source occurs in the form of research assistantship funding (in the form of scholarship or employment funding). These funds are paid predominantly through faculty member-held grants, and vary frequently in response to the cost of living or the availability of other funding. Increasing tuition costs may therefore be directly compensated for by faculty-member research funding, decreasing the money available to conduct research. Such concerns have already been raised by faculty members within the faculties of science and engineering, who would undoubtedly be adversely affected by the proposed increases to international tuition\(^16\).

The pace at which research occurs at UVIC may also be affected. International graduate students negatively affected by increasing tuition costs may require additional teaching assistantships hours or may be required to gain employment elsewhere. Such effects would reasonably decrease the availability of graduate students to work on their theses, elongating completion times and delaying the publication of students’ thesis work. Such metrics negatively affect UVIC’s research standing, and directly harm faculty members’ abilities to secure tri-council research funding\(^17\).

Given the effort that has gone into enhancing UVIC’s reputation as a research university over the last several decades, it is clear that any decisions which may negatively impact such progress must be handled with extreme prudence. Significant consultation with international graduate students, faculty

\(^{16}\) Personal notes — Graduate Executive Council meeting, Monday March 6\(^{th}\), 2017. Presentation by Jim Dunsdon and Tony Edar.

members, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the office of the Vice President Research would be advisable prior to the implementation of any increases to graduate tuition.

*How can we accurately calculate the cost of education?*

The decision to increase international tuition has not been made in isolation. A clear mandate from the provincial government has directed that international students must cover the cost of their own education. The current proposed increases are the result of a simple calculation meant to ensure this mandate is met. While we understand that such a mandate must be respected, we do not believe an appropriate calculation of the costs has been performed, and this rationale can therefore not be applied to the proposed increases at this time.

Such a calculation cannot simply assess the expenses associated with educating international graduate students without a parallel assessment of the value earned. International students contribute both financially and otherwise to the university and the community at large. International graduate students work as research assistants and teaching assistants, the pay for which is far below that at equivalent institutions and far below the industry standard. Several international students contribute directly to the well-being of Canadians through research on Canadian policy, history or health to name a few examples. International graduate students have also generated revenue for the university, through research and writing of UVIC-held patents and faculty member-held research grants.

Within the larger community, the over 3500 international students represent a large cohort of renters, which ensure continued high property values for the residents of Oak Bay and Gordon Head. Many faculty members and UVIC staff alike have benefitted from the purchase of home with rental suites, and the high rental income guaranteed with such suites. In BC alone, international graduate students spend $88M annual on accommodations and meals, to the benefit of local landlords. This $88M is a small fraction of the ~$207M of revenue brought into the province by international graduate students, $17M of which is discretionary, likely to the benefit of local businesses. In Victoria specifically, international graduate students also contribute ~$127 thousand dollars annually to local transit infrastructure.

In addition to the financial benefits outlined above, the societal and academic benefits to internationalization are self-evident. These benefits may be undermined if the pool of international students who select UVIC is undermined by new applicants’ financial concerns. Tuition increases must therefore be considered carefully, and purposefully, such that UVIC can continue to recruit the best and brightest graduate students, irrespective of financial circumstances or country of origin.

*Moving forward*

We have outlined several questions above, which we believe must be answered before a decision on international graduate tuition can reasonably be made. Specifically, we would like to know how the proposed tuition increases will affect current UVIC international graduate students, how the increases

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20 2015-2016 UVIC Graduate Students’ Society Audit.
will affect UVIC’s reputation (and international student recruitment), how the increases will affect UVIC’s research capacities, how precisely the cost of education is (and should) be calculated, and how specifically such proposed increases will benefit the university when considering the answers to the previous questions.

We understand this undertaking is significant. However, given the profound implications of such a decision on UVIC’s future we hope this decision will not be taken lightly. There is no need for the decoupling of international and domestic graduate tuition to occur at this moment, and we believe our evidence in fact argues the contrary.

We are committed to working with you to address the very real budgetary challenges faced by UVIC in this resource-constrained environment. As the primary researchers and teachers of this institution, we care deeply about this organization and want nothing more than to see its success continue. We invite you to discuss these matters with us at any time, and request your permission to speak to you directly at the March 28th meeting of the Board of Governors.

Until then, thank you for your service to this organization.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Amanda McLaughlin

Chair
University of Victoria Graduate Students’ Society
*On behalf of the GSS Graduate Representative Council and the Graduate Students’ Society Executive Board*
Methodology

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\text{Inflation to be funded by international students} \times \text{International students portion (\%) } \times \text{Annual inflationary Costs} = \text{Inflation to be funded by international students}
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\[
\text{Percentage increase} \times \text{Total international tuition} = \text{Inflation to be funded by international students}
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International Tuition Review

- Phase II
  a. Review of International Fees
  b. Consultation with members of the UVic community
  c. Include discussions around the potential impact of increased fees as well identifying critical support services for international students
  d. This process would inform the recommended fees for 2018/19+