

26 March 2026

2026 Report of the Graduate Council Subcommittee on Graduate Financial Matters

Introduction

The [Taskforce on Graduate Student Funding](#) submitted their report to the Provost in March 2024. The report included recommendations to publish aggregated data about financial support of graduate students annually, and to form a Subcommittee of Graduate Council to oversee the analysis of graduate payroll data and make recommendations concerning graduate funding matters. Following governance approvals of the Terms of Reference and membership, the [Subcommittee on Graduate Financial Matters](#) was established for 2025-26. The Subcommittee reports annually to Council and after consideration by Council the report is published, accompanied by a [Financial Data Dashboard](#) that provides aggregated graduate financial data.

Terms of Reference

The Sub-Committee on Graduate Financial Matters consists of seven Graduate Council members: Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, two Associate Deans (Graduate Studies), two faculty members, and two graduate students. The President of the Graduate Students Association is included as an observer.

The Subcommittee on Graduate Financial Matters:

- produces an annual report on aggregated graduate student financial support data for Graduate Council. This report is produced in partnership with the Office of Institutional Research & Analysis. After consideration by Graduate Council, the data will be presented publicly;
- considers questions that arise from issues of financial support for McMaster graduate students;
- recommends revisions to academic policies affecting graduate funding when deemed appropriate to Graduate Council.

Collective agreements and employment matters are not within the scope of the Subcommittee.

Membership 2025-26

Associate Deans

Steven Hanna, Faculty of Health Sciences (Chair)
Catherine Anderson, Faculty of Humanities

Faculty Members

Nicole Wagner, Faculty of Business
Bruce Milliken, Faculty of Science

Student Members

Aman Kumar, Faculty of Engineering, PhD Student
Camden Church, Faculty of Social Sciences, PhD Student

Ex Officio Member

Steve Hranilovic, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Observer (without vote)

Kusum Bhatta, President Graduate Students Association

2024-25 Graduate Financial Support

Following a recommendation of the Taskforce, a publicly available [Dashboard](#) provides aggregated financial data for students in research-oriented Master's and Doctoral programs, by Faculty and term-count-based status, for recent academic years. The financial data are based on records extracted by Institutional Research and Analysis, summarizing all payments to full-time graduate students through McMaster payroll from September to August of a given academic year. Fellowships, scholarships, bursaries, and employment income that is not administered by McMaster is not reflected in these figures. The Dashboard does not report data for part-time students nor for students enrolled in professional Master's programs, who do not normally receive funding support. The Subcommittee has access to additional analysis, not available through the public Dashboard.

Financial support is reported by status based on term count in the fall of the reporting year. Term count changes through the year, so some approximation is required to form meaningful categories when payments are aggregated over the year. PhD students are classified as **in-time** (within 4 years for the entire reporting year), **fifth year**, and **over-time**. Master's students are classified as **Year 1**, if their term count was 3 or less for the entire reporting year, and otherwise classified as **Year 2+**. Status classifications prioritize the clearest interpretation of funding for "in-time" PhD students and first year Master's students (see Appendix for details).

Sources of Financial Support

Graduate financial support is the sum of all compensation reported from the following sources:

- **Financial Awards:** School of Graduate Studies Scholarship Fund and other departmental sources.
- **Research Scholarship:** Primarily supervisors’ contribution to student stipends from research grants and contracts.
- **Scholarships:** Competitive, merit-based scholarships.
- **Employment:** All income from McMaster employment, primarily Teaching Assistantships and Research Assistantships in lieu of TA.
- **Bursaries:** Grants based on financial need.
- **Academic Grants:** Grants based on both financial need and academic merit.

The sources of financial support vary by Faculty. Table 1 shows the percentage of every Faculty’s total graduate support by category in 2024-25. McMaster’s Faculties are most clearly characterized by the degree to which their support is provided through employment (typically TA) and Research Scholarship (supervisors’ contributions). Engineering and Health Sciences students rely heavily on stipends paid from their supervisors’ research grants. Humanities and Social Sciences (and to a lesser degree, Business) provide the majority of their support through employment as TA. Science uses a more balanced blend of research funding and employment. Competitive scholarships account for a low percentage of student funding in Engineering, possibly because of their high proportion of international students who are typically not eligible for competitive funding in Canada.

The proportions of the above sources of financial support did not vary greatly by year from 2021-22 to 2024-25 (see the [Dashboard](#)).

Table 1. Percentage of total support by source and Faculty for in-time PhD and first year research Master’s students, 2024-25.

	Science	Engineering	Health Sciences	Humanities	Social Science	sBusiness
Academic Grant	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Bursary	0.4%	0.2%	1.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%
Employment	35.0%	26.2%	16.6%	43.0%	40.4%	36.6%
Financial Award	17.3%	16.2%	21.6%	24.2%	21.1%	32.5%
Research Scholarship	26.9%	50.7%	36.4%	2.9%	4.1%	19.8%
Scholarships	20.4%	6.8%	24.0%	29.1%	33.6%	11.0%

Amounts of Graduate Financial Support

The Subcommittee’s analysis of funding focusses on trends in institutional practices for the range of typical financial packages for in-time study, meaning first-year Master’s and in-time PhD students. We provide additional analyses of fifth-year PhD students because it is a recommendation of the Subcommittee to focus monitoring on this group. Data for over-time PhD and Year 2+ Master’s students is available from the [Dashboard](#).

In-Time PhD Students

Table 2 shows the percentiles of total payments to in-time PhD students by year and Faculty, emphasizing the 2-year change and the trend over all available years. Median (P50) support was highest in the small PhD program in Business but support in 2024-25 was otherwise similar among the Faculties. For all Faculties, to varying degrees, the trend has been for an increase in median support from 2021-22 to 2023-24, leveling in 2024-25. This trend possibly relates to activity of the Taskforce and anticipatory responses to the recommendations, including increases to the minimum PhD stipend. Two-year increases were largest in Business, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Table 3 shows distance between P25 and P75, which defines the interquartile range, interpretable as the band that summarizes the middle 50% of all support. As the median funding has increased, so too has the variability in funding. Table 2 shows that the 75th percentile of income has been increasing faster than the 25th percentile in the Faculties where the interquartile range is widening most, on both a percentage and absolute dollar basis. Whether this pattern of changes relates to recent investments in Federal Tri-Council scholarship programs or some other factors remains unclear.

Fifth Year PhD Students

Students in the fifth year of a PhD no longer have guaranteed funding, and may have lost their entitlement to TA employment. Although some students in all disciplines study over-time, a fifth year of study is most common in some areas of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Business. Business and Social Sciences had the highest ratio of fifth year students to in-time students for 2024-25 (as percentages: 32%, 28%).

Table 4 compares total compensation for fifth-year PhD students in 2024-25 to the funding for in-time students. These comparisons are complicated by cohort effects because students in their fifth year were admitted with financial packages comparable to 2020-21. As an approximation, we show comparisons to funding for students who were in-time for 2021-22, the earliest data available. As expected, fifth-year students experience losses of median income relative to 2021-22 in-time students in every Faculty except Health Sciences. In Health Sciences, TA employment is a relatively infrequent source of income, and those who acquire TA work often do so after admission, resulting in employment guarantees that persist into a fifth year.

Supervisors in Health Sciences contribute a relatively larger proportion of total support and they have the discretion to continue their contributions to stipends after program funds are redirected to incoming students. The price of this discretion is the wide interquartile range such that disparities in financial support appear in the fifth year when funding is no longer tightly regulated. This fifth-year disparity is clear in every Faculty and particularly in Social Sciences, where the difference between the 25th and 75th percentile was over \$31,000 in 2024-25.

First-Year Master's Students

Percentiles of funding for first-year research Master's students are shown in Table 5. It is an important feature of the Master's data that not all "research" programs are thesis-based. Many research Master's programs are course-based with a capstone project or major paper. The table breaks out funding for thesis-based programs. This is a particularly important distinction in Health Sciences, where supervisor's contributions from research grants must be paid to students who are working on the funded research, as a thesis. There are few thesis-based Master's programs in Social Sciences and Humanities. In most STEM and Health Sciences Disciplines, thesis-based students may transfer to PhD before completing their Master's and the first year of Master's enrolment may often be viewed as probationary to PhD study. Master's study in Business is almost exclusively professional.

Table 2. Percentiles of total financial support for in-time PhD students (25th, Median, 75th).

Faculty & Year	Student Headcount	P25	P50	P75
Business				
2021-22	64	\$29,995	\$33,578	\$39,807
2022-23	54	\$31,746	\$37,549	\$41,939
2023-24	47	\$41,752	\$45,470	\$54,274
2024-25	38	\$40,220	\$44,964	\$54,278
Change 202/3-24/5		\$8,475	\$7,415	\$12,339
Engineering				
2021-22	458	\$25,666	\$28,242	\$33,770
2022-23	414	\$26,308	\$30,539	\$34,848
2023-24	454	\$28,541	\$32,169	\$37,353
2024-25	462	\$29,722	\$32,494	\$38,641
Change 202/3-24/5		\$3,415	\$1,955	\$3,793
Health Sciences				
2021-22	282	\$24,243	\$28,354	\$36,306
2022-23	284	\$25,480	\$30,385	\$38,220
2023-24	288	\$26,500	\$36,552	\$42,965
2024-25	274	\$27,500	\$36,685	\$44,223
Change 202/3-24/5		\$2,020	\$6,300	\$6,003
Humanities				
2021-22	113	\$24,181	\$28,738	\$35,000
2022-23	111	\$24,618	\$29,360	\$33,527
2023-24	107	\$26,748	\$33,149	\$38,436
2024-25	114	\$28,172	\$32,321	\$41,706
Change 202/3-24/5		\$3,555	\$2,960	\$8,179
Science				
2021-22	275	\$25,943	\$29,060	\$34,036
2022-23	277	\$26,988	\$29,299	\$34,828
2023-24	285	\$29,963	\$31,406	\$36,656
2024-25	281	\$30,140	\$32,140	\$40,836
Change 202/3-24/5		\$3,152	\$2,842	\$6,008
Social Science				
2021-22	160	\$23,370	\$29,835	\$36,982
2022-23	145	\$23,566	\$29,008	\$37,000
2023-24	136	\$27,747	\$33,442	\$46,960
2024-25	124	\$27,883	\$34,537	\$49,293
Change 202/3-24/5		\$4,317	\$5,528	\$12,293

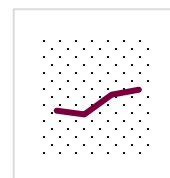
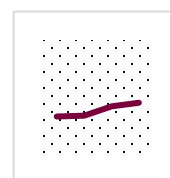
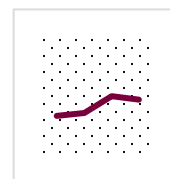
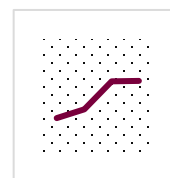
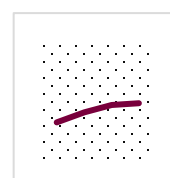
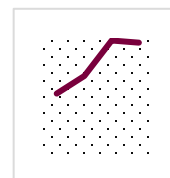


Table 3. Interquartile ranges (P75-P25) of funding for in-time PhD students.

Faculty & Year	Interquartile Range
Business	
2021-22	\$9,812
2022-23	\$10,194
2023-24	\$12,522
2024-25	\$14,058
Engineering	
2021-22	\$8,103
2022-23	\$8,540
2023-24	\$8,812
2024-25	\$8,919
Health Sciences	
2021-22	\$12,063
2022-23	\$12,740
2023-24	\$16,465
2024-25	\$16,723
Humanities	
2021-22	\$10,819
2022-23	\$8,909
2023-24	\$11,688
2024-25	\$13,534
Science	
2021-22	\$8,093
2022-23	\$7,840
2023-24	\$6,693
2024-25	\$10,696
Social Science	
2021-22	\$13,612
2022-23	\$13,434
2023-24	\$19,212
2024-25	\$21,410

Table 4. Support to Fifth-year PhD in 2024-25 compared to in-time students.

Year	Student Headcount	P25	P50	P75
Business				
In-Time 2021-22	64	\$29,995	\$33,578	\$39,807
In-Time 2024-25	38	\$40,220	\$44,964	\$54,278
5th year 2024-25	12	\$25,364	\$26,135	\$34,571
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$4,631)	(\$7,443)	(\$5,236)
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$14,856)	(\$18,829)	(\$19,707)
Engineering				
In-Time 2021-22	458	\$25,666	\$28,242	\$33,770
In-Time 2024-25	462	\$29,722	\$32,494	\$38,641
5th year 2024-25	75	\$17,918	\$26,196	\$32,716
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$7,748)	(\$2,046)	(\$1,054)
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$11,804)	(\$6,298)	(\$5,926)
Health Sciences				
In-Time 2021-22	282	\$24,243	\$28,354	\$36,306
In-Time 2024-25	274	\$27,500	\$36,685	\$44,223
5th year 2024-25	51	\$6,865	\$28,581	\$37,372
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$17,378)	\$227	\$1,066
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$20,635)	(\$8,104)	(\$6,851)
Humanities				
In-Time 2021-22	113	\$24,181	\$28,738	\$35,000
In-Time 2024-25	114	\$28,172	\$32,321	\$41,706
5th year 2024-25	20	\$10,961	\$19,795	\$38,846
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$13,221)	(\$8,943)	\$3,846
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$17,212)	(\$12,525)	(\$2,859)
Science				
In-Time 2021-22	275	\$25,943	\$29,060	\$34,036
In-Time 2024-25	281	\$30,140	\$32,140	\$40,836
5th year 2024-25	44	\$8,762	\$19,674	\$24,078
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$17,181)	(\$9,386)	(\$9,958)
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$21,378)	(\$12,466)	(\$16,758)
Social Science				
In-Time 2021-22	160	\$23,370	\$29,835	\$36,982
In-Time 2024-25	124	\$27,883	\$34,537	\$49,293
5th year 2024-25	35	\$3,929	\$16,044	\$34,993
vs in-time 2021-22		(\$19,441)	(\$13,792)	(\$1,989)
vs in-time 2024-25		(\$23,954)	(\$18,493)	(\$14,300)

Table 5. Percentiles of Total Support for first year Master’s students (25th, Median, 75th).

Year	Student Headcount	P25	P50	P75	Student Headcount	P25	P50	P75
Business								
Counts less than 10					Counts less than 10			
Engineering								
2021-22	153	\$8,581	\$23,190	\$31,931	All research Master's are thesis-based			
2022-23	131	\$23,545	\$30,803	\$35,923				
2023-24	160	\$16,063	\$29,334	\$37,710				
2024-25	145	\$18,382	\$29,386	\$37,839				
Change 202/3-24/5		(\$5,163)	(\$1,417)	\$1,916				
Health Sciences								
					Health Sciences Thesis-Based Only			
2021-22	319	\$2,500	\$4,100	\$21,000	96	\$20,685	\$23,497	\$26,453
2022-23	319	\$2,800	\$4,700	\$21,930	94	\$19,126	\$26,296	\$29,803
2023-24	335	\$2,500	\$5,833	\$23,500	116	\$19,274	\$25,209	\$31,091
2024-25	348	\$2,500	\$5,130	\$21,915	97	\$22,500	\$26,800	\$31,917
Change 202/3-24/5		(\$300)	\$430	(\$15)	Change 2022-24	\$3,375	\$504	\$2,114
Humanities								
					Humanities Thesis-Based Only			
2021-22	93	\$15,181	\$17,431	\$24,247	23	\$18,181	\$22,681	\$29,431
2022-23	64	\$15,906	\$18,515	\$25,384	13	\$17,445	\$19,301	\$31,445
2023-24	79	\$18,028	\$19,199	\$24,161	11	\$19,028	\$21,090	\$24,161
2024-25	69	\$16,920	\$19,172	\$21,420	13	\$19,172	\$20,720	\$26,720
Change 202/3-24/5		\$1,013	\$658	(\$3,964)	Change 2022-24	\$1,727	\$1,418	(\$4,725)
Science								
					Science Thesis-Based Only			
2021-22	153	\$23,148	\$27,542	\$32,494	139	\$24,512	\$28,181	\$32,609
2022-23	142	\$24,820	\$27,761	\$35,025	133	\$25,662	\$28,844	\$35,724
2023-24	156	\$25,948	\$30,278	\$38,691	146	\$27,109	\$31,202	\$38,746
2024-25	152	\$22,577	\$29,724	\$37,245	147	\$22,928	\$29,922	\$37,408
Change 202/3-24/5		(\$2,244)	\$1,963	\$2,221	Change 2022-24	(\$2,734)	\$1,078	\$1,684
Social Science								
					Social Science Thesis-Based Only			
2021-22	137	\$5,600	\$12,203	\$17,317	17	\$719	\$11,010	\$22,708
2022-23	102	\$6,535	\$16,375	\$18,814	Counts less than 10			
2023-24	112	\$10,104	\$17,149	\$19,449	11	\$2,786	\$11,223	\$15,863
2024-25	100	\$7,309	\$16,458	\$20,750	11	\$9,737	\$11,860	\$32,511
Change 202/3-24/5		\$774	\$83	\$1,936	Counts less than 10			

Progress on Recommendations

Table 6. Progress on Taskforce and Subcommittee recommendations.

Taskforce Recommendations	Taskforce 2024	2025	2026	
Remove limits on hours of work (FS1)	Complete	Complete	Complete	
Clarify available financial support (FS2)	In progress	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Complete	
Support for affordable housing (FS3)	Not started	Not started	Not started	a
Alternative payment schedule (FS4)	Not started	Not started	Not started	b
Publish aggregate funding data (CF1)	In progress	In progress	Complete	
Establish a GC subcommittee on financial matters (CF2)	Not started	In progress	Complete	
Regular review of letters of offer (CF3)	Complete	Complete	Complete	
Increase awareness of available awards (CF4)	In progress	Complete	Complete	
Inform about sources of financial support (CF5)	In progress	In progress	Complete	c
Support for international students: living in Canada (IS1)	In progress	Complete	Complete	
Support for international students: scholarships (IS2)	In progress	Complete	Complete	
Support for international students: career readiness (IS3)	In progress	Complete	Complete	
Support for international students: visa and employment (IS4)	In progress	Complete	Complete	d
Support for international students: advancement (IS5)	Not started	In progress	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	e
Regulations on financial benefit from scholarships (FA1)	Not started	Complete	Complete	
Ensure incentives to apply (FA2)	In progress	Complete	Complete	
Clarify funding adjustment policy prior to applications (FA3)	Not started	Complete	Complete	
Faculty policies on funding adjustment (FA4)	Not started	Complete	Complete	
Review PhD program data for completion times etc (4Y1)	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	f
Investigate disciplinary norms for completion (4Y2)	In progress	Complete	Complete	g
Support time management and writing skills, PhD (4Y3)	In progress	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	h
Support for timely completion (4Y4)	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	Partially complete, further progress would require rethinking as a new project	i
Consider role of completion times when approving programs (4Y5)	Complete	Complete	Complete	
Subcommittee Recommendations				
Subcommittee oversees further analysis of disparities in funding			In progress	
Annual review of financial aspects of letters, processes, and records			In progress	
Feasibility of annual review of completion data for all graduate programs			Not started	
Ongoing analysis and monitoring of financial conditions for fifth year PhD			In progress	



Notes on Progress

Table 6 shows a heatmap representation of progress on the recommendations in the 2024 Taskforce report. In March 2025, the Vice-Provost and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies submitted a [one-year progress report](#) to Graduate Council. The Subcommittee takes on the role of annual progress reports for the Taskforce recommendations and any new initiatives they recommend.

Recommendations coded as yellow have progressed as far as they can without a significant reappraisal and replacement with a new recommendation. The notes below explain the basis of selected assessments. Please see the [Taskforce report](#) for the full recommendations.

- a. The 2025 Progress report describes the supports available to identify off-campus housing and anticipate costs of living in relation to tuition. The specific recommendation to develop “housing bursaries” is not consistent with the institutional model for aid. There are many bursaries available to graduate students based on financial need, but they consider overall need, not specific costs.
- b. The SGS Grad Pay project has completed the first phase of its work, integrating all the financial systems that affect graduate students, including tuitions, scholarships, aid & awards, and payroll. There has yet to be progress on payroll scheduling, which faces a number of additional technical challenges. Further investigation on the feasibility of implementing alternative payment schedules is planned.
- c. In addition to the previously available financial counselling available to international students through International Student Services at the Student Support Centre, the School of Graduate Studies has partnered with the [Mac Money Centre](#) to expand workshop support to all graduate students.
- d. As of the 2026 admissions admission cycle, all letters of offer to international graduate students include an invitation to a webinar about immigration matters and an offer of individual counselling with an immigration advisor.
- e. SGS works with Advancement to develop and approve the terms of endowed scholarships, in alignment with the interests of the donor. McMaster will launch its first major advancement campaign in many years in September 2027. This likely will include priorities for graduate student scholarships. However, the realization of opportunities for support to international graduate students depends on our ability to appeal to donors with a passion for international graduate study. This an uncertain enterprise.
- f. As noted in the progress report, data about completion times and withdrawals is an aspect of McMaster’s Institutional Quality Assurance process for periodic appraisal of programs. It may be undertaken on an ad hoc basis when there are concerns about a specific program. The Subcommittee agrees that annual delivery of a minimal set of student outcome data would be beneficial for all graduate programs.
- g. In November 2024, the Faculty of Humanities completed an internal report entitled “Re-Imagining the PhD”. The recommendations resulted in changes to several programs, aimed at increasing likelihood of completion in 4 years. Changes included the structure of comprehensive exams, course-requirements, and the permissibility of sandwich format for theses.
- h. [Skills workshops](#) for writing, time management, career counselling, and job search coaching are available centrally. An expansion of these services would be a significant new project.

- i. Timely completion is an ongoing focus of program management and discussions among academic leaders. Beyond this, it is unclear what specific activity is recommended.

New Recommendations

Members of the Subcommittee noted that the analysis of graduate financial data undertaken during the Taskforce, reinforced by the spirit of transparency, has been beneficial in dispelling misconceptions, bringing nuance to difficult discussions, and motivating changes in funding, policy, and financial practice over the past two years. This view has framed the Subcommittee's work and the resulting recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The Subcommittee should oversee further analyses of variability in graduate funding.
2. SGS should conduct annual review of the financial aspects of Letters of Offer and administrative processes to ensure that information to applicants and students is clear and current.
3. The Subcommittee and SGS should work with Institutional Research & Analysis to explore the feasibility of annual reporting of graduate student completion and withdrawal data for all programs, as an aspect of continuous quality improvement.
4. The Subcommittee should continue to conduct analysis and monitoring of the financial conditions for fifth-year PhD students, as part of its annual reporting to Graduate Council.

Appendix

Term-Based Classifications of Status

For the analyses in this report and the aggregate data available in the Dashboard, a student's **Status** is determined by their term count in the fall of the reporting year. These definitions of status therefore require approximation because terms counts change throughout the year, whereas we must assess it only once. The status classifications outlined below are constructed to prioritize the clearest interpretation of funding for students considered to be studying “in-time” for the entire year, in any Faculty.

Status	Fall Term Count
• PhD in-time	1-10
• PhD fifth year	11-13
• PhD over time	14 or more
• Master's year 1	1
• Master's year 2+	2 or more