

Department of Geography Graduate Program

Policy on Graduate Student Funding

Graduate Program Committee

The Department of Geography has various resources at its disposal to support thesis-based graduate students. These include funds that are made available to the Department from the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), the University, and the Government of Alberta. We use these funds in conjunction with student-held external scholarships and individual faculty research grants to support highly-ranked MA, MSc, and PhD students, subject to the availability of qualified supervisory support. Our primary goal in distributing funds is to provide competitive, adequate¹ funding.

The main sources of funding from the University of Calgary are graduate teaching assistantships (TAs) and Faculty of Graduate Studies scholarships (FGSS). Senior PhD students can also teach a course and receive funding through a graduate teaching fellowship (GTF). Each year the Department is allocated a quota of TA and FGSS funds from the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Our annual allocation is competitive within the University of Calgary; FGS has developed a formula for distributing these funds based on a number of performance metrics. This formula means that our annual allocation fluctuates and there are always uncertainties in our annual budget. Beginning in 2010, provincial Queen Elizabeth Scholarships (QE awards) have also been delegated to the Departments to be used as part of our base budget for graduate student funding. Unlike GTA and FGSS funds, these are only available to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants.

There are two rounds of admissions to the Department of Geography graduate program each year: September and January admissions. There are 25-35 applicants in a typical year, with Departmental funding usually available for 8-10 of these prospective students. The Graduate Program Committee meets for each competition to evaluate and rank each applicant's file. The highest-ranked candidates are given first consideration for offers of admission with Departmental funding. However, there are situations where highly-ranked students do not receive Departmental funding. Most commonly this is because a supervisor already has two active departmentally-funded students; we set this as an internal limit in order to spread the Departmental funding more equitably across faculty members. In other cases a student may be highly-ranked but may hold a major scholarship. This closely parallels the level of NSERC and SSHRC awards or the prospective supervisor may express a wish to fund the student in order to satisfy commitments of a research grant. Finally, it is not unusual for highly ranked students to be denied both funding and an offer of admission because no suitable supervisor is available, or a prospective supervisor is overcommitted and cannot take on new students. As of 2009-2010, Masters students that are offered admission with full funding are guaranteed a minimum of \$19,000/yr for two years. Full funding for PhD students is set at a minimum of \$21,000/yr for four years.

¹ Adequate funding means sufficient funds to study full-time, with no need for supplementary employment. At the minimum level of funding it may be difficult to live alone or maintain a car, but it should be possible to meet basic needs. Competitive funding means at a standard that is comparable to or better than graduate level funding at other Canadian universities. This closely parallels the level of NSERC and SSHRC awards.

Funding levels are rarely precise due to the many different combinations; the Department therefore honours its commitments based on a minimum rather than an exact value. International students have to pay a differential tuition fee that amounts to roughly twice the annual tuition fee of domestic students. The Department values the contributions of its international students and aspires to a diverse graduate student environment, so we assist in offsetting a portion of the differential tuition fee to each thesis-based graduate student that receives Departmental funding by providing a scholarship called the 'Geography Excellence Award'. These funds are a top up to the base funding level, so that international and domestic graduate students receive the same net funding. Students may be awarded minor internal or external scholarships (those less than \$3000) or they may receive a 'top-up' from their supervisor's research funds without impact on their Departmental funding. However, if a student receives a major scholarship such as the University of Calgary Open Scholarship, NSERC, SSHRC, ICORE, or Alberta Ingenuity awards, Departmental funding will be scaled back in order to promote equity and free up funding for other students in the program. In all cases graduate students with major awards will still be partially supported by the Department, such that their minimum level of funding is set at the base level plus \$5000 per year (Open Scholarship) or base level plus \$7500 per year (Tri-Council, Alberta Ingenuity, or ICORE funding). Students that are supported by their supervisor have a private relationship for funding and are encouraged to get this in writing so that both student and supervisor understand the commitment. In the interest of equity, we encourage supervisors to fund their graduate students at the same minimum level as that set by the Department. This is not enforced, however. In some cases a graduate student enters the program without Departmental or supervisor funding. Such contracts should be entered carefully, as they can lead to prolonged theses and unhappy students. Once a student is admitted without funding, support in subsequent years is unlikely.

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