

McGill Graduate Student Funding Report 2022-2023

"Feed Researchers, Feed Research"



***Report prepared by the McGill Post
Graduate Student Society***

October, 2023

1. Executive Summary

“Between my personal experience and conversations with other graduate students, the recurring themes are financial stress and decreased mental health. Graduate students are qualified, intelligent, hard-working individuals that have made the decision to pursue research in important fields. And yet, they are overworked, underpaid, and often overwhelmed with the intense pressures on them.”

From February to March 2023, the PGSS Funding Working Group held a survey to collect data on the current state of graduate student funding at McGill. In this report, we present the findings of this survey and make recommendations for improving the future of funding at McGill.

Across Canada, the effects of inflation are impacting the lives of millions. For graduate students, the financial difficulties caused by inflation are compounded by living on a fixed income: despite an unprecedented rise in the cost of living, the value of many federal, provincial, and university-level awards has remained unchanged for many years. As a result, **the average graduate student at McGill takes home only \$12,000 per year**. However, this average hides a large variation among graduate students, as shown in this report. For comparison, a full-time minimum-wage worker in Quebec has a take-home pay of just under \$24,000 per year, and the Institute for Socioeconomic Research and Information (IRIS) estimates that an adult in Montreal with no dependents needs \$32,000 per year to be financially sustainable. We found that **72% of McGill graduate students make less than a full-time minimum-wage worker, and 88% make less than a sustainable income**.

The effects of financial stress can be severe and have both short and long-term consequences on health and well-being. Sleep disruption, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are just some of the potential effects of facing financial stress. The financial pressure only adds to the stress that McGill graduate students already face from conducting world-class research. Graduate students at McGill are making large contributions to their fields of study. Graduate students are the backbone of science and culture in Canada and are integral to both the communities and industries in which they work. **The inadequacy of current financial compensation practices is not only harmful to the individual researchers, but also a barrier to research success at McGill.**

This report provides detailed information on the income and expenses of McGill graduate students. From this information, we propose recommendations for McGill President Deep Saini, McGill Dean of Students Robin Beech, and McGill Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Josephine Nalbantoglu. The main goal of this report is to open channels of communication between McGill and its students regarding graduate funding. McGill is already a leader of academic excellence in Canada, and we believe that it can become a leader in graduate funding, setting an example for the rest of the country.

2. Introduction

“If we want to encourage people to seek higher education, keeping them just at or below the poverty line while they do it is not a way to make school an attractive option.”

The PGSS *Funding Working Group (FWG)* was established in 2020 to assess the impacts of McGill's funding practices on the financial, physical, and mental health of its graduate students. This group has two main objectives. The first is to evaluate the quality and availability of graduate funding. The second objective is to act as advocates for improving the financial compensation of graduate students across the university. From February to March 2023, the FWG held a survey to collect data on the current state of graduate student funding at McGill. In this report, we present the findings of this survey and make recommendations for improving the future of funding at McGill.

In recent years, the discourse around research funding has become increasingly widespread. The under-compensation of graduate students has become publicized through media coverage, showcasing the stories of struggling graduate students, the student-led demonstrations pushing for nationwide change and the steps taken by some universities to support their students^{1,2,3,4}. Many graduate students struggle to maintain a basic quality of life in the current cost-of-living crisis. In 2022, the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* conducted an international survey in which 85% of graduate student respondents indicated that they worried about having enough money to cover basic expenses such as food and rent⁵. A similar survey of Canadian graduate students by the Ottawa Science Policy Network found that 85.7% of respondents faced financial anxiety during their degrees, prompting 30.7% to consider leaving their programs for financial reasons⁶. Approximately 30% of respondents reported worrying about paying for necessities, like rent and groceries⁶.

Across Canada, the effects of inflation are impacting the lives of millions. For graduate students, the financial difficulties caused by inflation are compounded by living on a fixed income: despite an unprecedented rise in the cost of living, the value of many federal,

¹ Crawley, M. (2022, December 24). Canada's grants for master's, PhD students haven't increased since 2003. These researchers want that changed. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/graduate-student-research-funding-nserc-sshr-cih-1.6692545>

² Marhnouj, S. (2022, August 20). Ottawa grad students, postdocs facing 'huge financial burden'. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/graduate-students-affordability-living-costs-1.6551913>

³ CBC News (2023, May 1). Canadian academics, graduate students walk out, demanding increased federal funding for researchers. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/canadian-academics-walk-out-1.6828424>

⁴ Donnini, A. (2023, February 18). Western commits \$500K for struggling grad students, students push for long-term solutions. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/western-500k-bursary-graduate-students-1.6753097>

⁵ Woolston, C. (2022). 'Not even enough money for food': graduate students face cash crunch. *Nature*, 611(7934), 189–191. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-03478-x>

⁶ Laframboise, S. J., Bailey, T., Dang, A. T., Rose, M., Zhou, Z., Berg, M. D., ... & Sinclair, K. (2023). Analysis of financial challenges faced by graduate students in Canada. *Biochemistry and Cell Biology*. 101(4): 326-360.

provincial, and university-level awards has remained unchanged. In the last twelve months (August 2022 to August 2023), the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Montreal increased by 5.2%, and there has been a 55% increase in CPI in the 20 years since the federal Tri-Council grants were increased⁷. The rising cost of living has caused many graduate students to fall below the poverty line. **As of May 2023, the Institute for Socioeconomic Research and Information (IRIS) has set the minimum sustainable income for one adult in Montreal at \$32,252 per year⁸.** This minimum sustainable income is \$2,676 (9 %) greater than 2022, exemplifying the substantial increases happening to the cost of living over relatively short periods of time⁸.

While the average rent in Montreal may be more affordable than other large Canadian cities like Vancouver or Toronto, the cost of housing in Montreal is far from cheap. The unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant (UTILE) conducted a survey in 2020 to examine the costs incurred by student renters across Canada ⁹. At that time, it was estimated that ***student renters in Montreal pay 38% higher rent than non-student renters***. For Montreal, 4,905 students were surveyed. The data collected from this survey indicated that in 2020, the median rent for a studio apartment was \$761, \$845 for a one-bedroom, \$980 for a two-bedroom, and \$1,340 for a three-bedroom unit⁹. Given the effects of inflation, these numbers are under-representing the actual cost to students in 2023.

The effects of financial stress can be severe and have long-term consequences on health and well-being. In the short term, living with financial stress significantly decreases the quality of life of people and their dependents. It severely limits choice in the lives of those affected. Sacrifices are often made on necessities like living arrangements, food, and toiletries where a cheap price trumps quality or comfort. Many less essential expenses are out of the question – gym memberships, social outings, and traveling to visit family. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that those living with financial stress are more likely to experience sleep disturbances, depression, and suicidal ideation^{10,11,12}.

This financial stress is an addition to the stress that McGill graduate students already face from conducting world-class research. McGill openly strives to produce high-caliber research and contribute to academia at the highest standard. Hundreds of students across the university are emerging experts in their fields, publishing high-impact work that

⁷ As per <https://statistique.quebec.ca/en/document/consumer-price-index-cpi/tableau/consumer-price-index-cpi-overall-index-canada-quebec-montreal-cma-monthly-data-not-seasonally-adjusted>

⁸ Labrie, Nyugen, & Couturier (2023). Le revenu viable de 2023 dans la spirale de l'inflation et des baisses d'impôt. <https://iris-recherche.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Revenu-viable-2023-WEB.pdf>

⁹ Unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant (2022). On Student Housing in Canada Research Report. https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/604e1456a8cd2bab84c72bc8/6312321ae56ed92137241afb_FLASH_20220902_ENG_VF.pdf

¹⁰ Guan, N., Guariglia, A., Moore, P., Xu, F., & Al-Janabi, H. (2022). Financial stress and depression in adults: A systematic review. *PloS one*, 17(2), e0264041. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0264041>

¹¹ Piotrowski, M. C., Lunsford, J., & Gaynes, B. N. (2021). Lifestyle psychiatry for depression and anxiety: Beyond diet and exercise. *Lifestyle Medicine*, 2(1), e21.

¹² Nagata, J. M., Palar, K., Gooding, H. C., Garber, A. K., Whittle, H. J., Bibbins-Domingo, K., & Weiser, S. D. (2019). Food Insecurity Is Associated With Poorer Mental Health and Sleep Outcomes in Young Adults. *The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 65(6), 805–811. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.08.010>

propels their area of study. These students are the next generation of scientists, historians, musicians, medical practitioners lawyers, and more. The current financial stressors placed on these students are a **barrier** to success. Despite many graduate students working well above a 40-hour work week on their research, practicums or internships, they are often forced to take a second or third job. Overworked yet financially struggling, many students find themselves losing motivation, unwilling to continue sacrificing their financial, mental and physical health.

The PGSS aims to give all graduate students at McGill the chance to thrive within their degrees. We undertake the Graduate Student Funding Survey every two years to assess the adequacy of student funding at the University, to highlight problems and work towards solutions. We hope that the data presented herein will spark conversation across the University, opening channels of communication between various levels of McGill administration and students. Together, we hope to inspire improvements within the funding system at the University.

3. Survey information

Participation rates and demographic breakdown of respondents

As of Fall 2022, 10,344 graduate students were enrolled at McGill¹³. The PGSS graduate funding survey received 2111 total survey responses, including 86 French responses and 2025 English responses. **One fifth (20.4 %) of the graduate student population responded to our survey.** Of those 2111 responses, 1730 had a complete data set, for which the results are presented herein. Responses were excluded if they were duplicates of previous entries, non-McGill graduate students, or if the answers were incomplete (more than half the survey was unanswered).

We received student responses from each of the ten faculties with graduate students. We received 555 responses from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, 350 from Science, 227 from Engineering, 221 from Arts, 97 from Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, 79 from Education, 60 from interfaculty students, 42 from Dental Medicine and Oral Health Sciences, 36 from Music, 35 from Management, and 27 from Law **(Figure 1)**.

¹³ As per: <https://www.mcgill.ca/about/quickfacts>

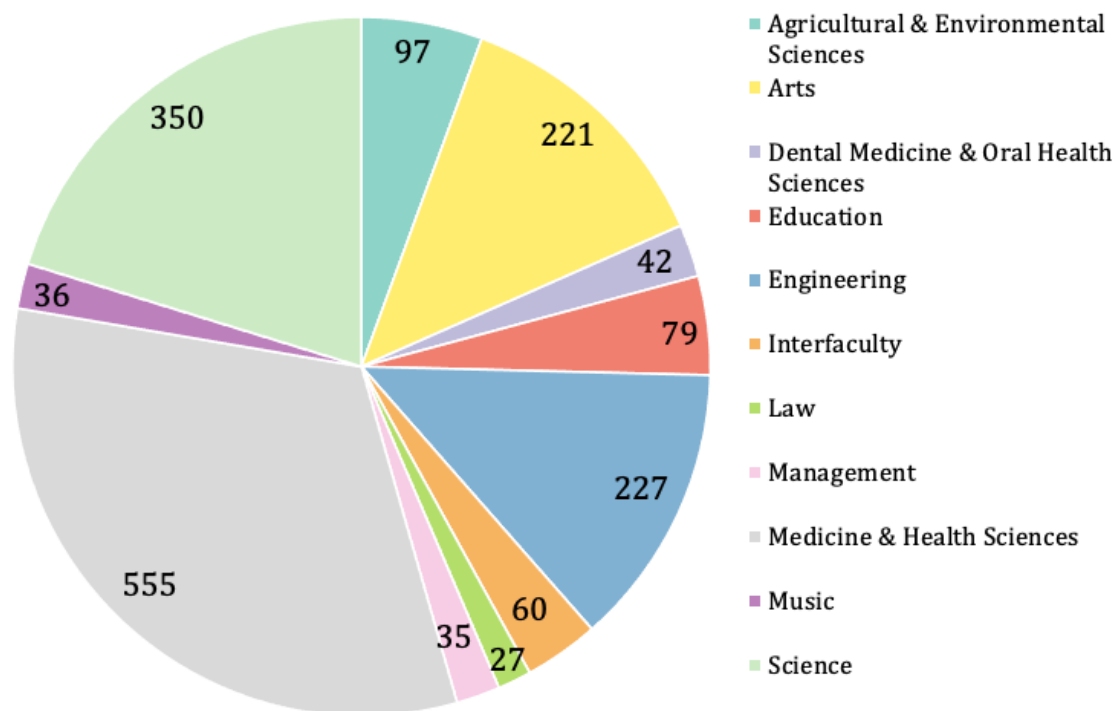


Figure 1: Response rate of graduate students per faculty. The number of respondents from each faculty is labelled within each slice of the chart.

The participation rate of students varied within faculties. All but three faculties (Education, Management, and Music) had over 10% of their students respond to the survey. In four of the ten faculties, over 20% of students responded to the survey (Dental Medicine & Oral Health Sciences, Engineering, Medicine & Health Sciences and Science) **(Table 1)**.

Table 1: Survey response rate per faculty.

Faculty	Total survey responses	Percent of total survey sample	Total enrollment in faculty	Percent of faculty enrollment
Agricultural & Environmental Sciences	97	5.6%	591	16.4%
Arts	221	12.8%	1142	19.4%
Dental Medicine & Oral Health Sciences	42	2.4%	79	53.2%
Education	79	4.6%	1030	7.7%
Engineering	227	13.1%	1078	21.1%
Interfaculty	60	3.5%	803	7.5%
Law	27	1.6%	165	16.4%
Management (Desautels)	35	2.0%	710	4.9%
Medicine & Health Sciences	555	32.1%	2331	23.8%
Music	36	2.1%	373	9.7%
Science	350	20.2%	1278	27.4%
Total	1730	100%	9580	100%

Table 1 summarizes the total survey responses per faculty, enrollment statistics for the 2022-2023 academic year¹⁴ and the percentage of each faculty that responded to the survey.

Completing the survey took approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Despite the time required to fill out the survey, over 20% of graduate students completed at least part of the survey, and almost 17% of students filled out all questions. 540 students also took the time to leave comments – many of which were long and detailed recounts of their personal issues with funding. The high response rate is indicative of the fact that **students are invested in the discussion around funding and are ready to share their perspectives.**

In the following sections, we will present information pertaining to the demographics of survey respondents. We present the degree levels, residency, primary campus, gender and racial distribution of our sample.

¹⁴ As per: <https://www.mcgill.ca/es/registration-statistics>

a. Degree

Of the 1730 survey responses, 43.1% (745 respondents) were enrolled in a Master's program and 56.8% (982 respondents) were enrolled in a PhD program. Of the Master's students, 533 were in thesis-based programs, while 212 were in non-thesis-based programs. 0.6% of students (10 respondents) were enrolled in Graduate Certificates or Diplomas. Most respondents were full-time students (98.8%) while twenty respondents (1.2%) were part-time students.

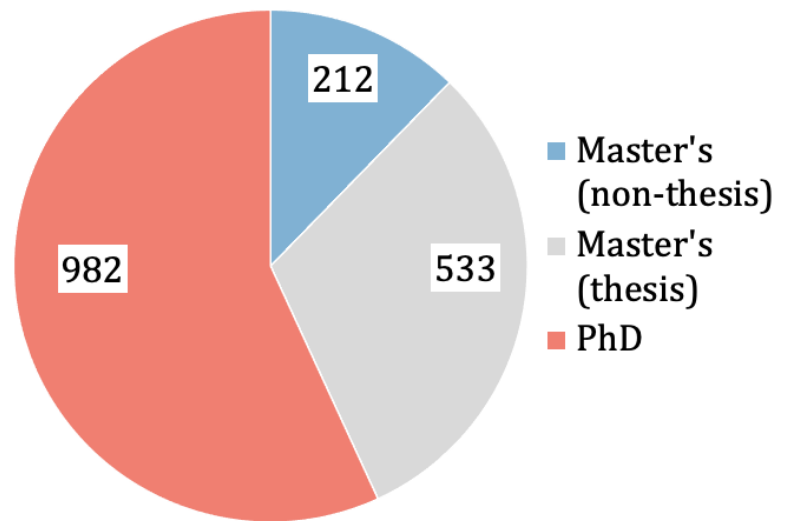
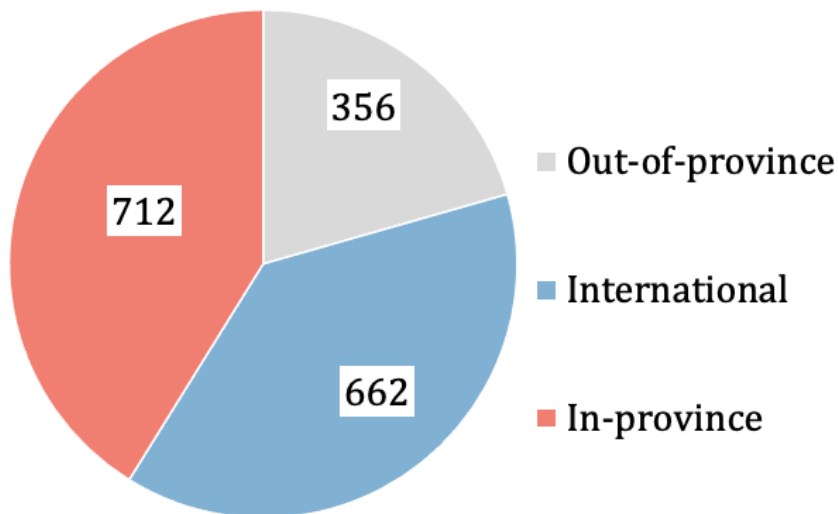


Figure 2: Degree level of respondents. Chart shows number of students enrolled as Master's (non-thesis), Master's (thesis) and PhD students. Graduate Certificate or Diploma entries (10 responses) are not shown on chart.

b. Residency



In many cases, a student's tuition and funding are dependent on their residency. A total of 662 respondents were International students (38.3%), 356 were Canadian/Out-of-province students (20.6%), and 712 were Quebec/In-province students (41.2%).

Figure 3: Reported residency of respondents. Chart shows number of students considered as Canadian/Out-of-Province, International, and Quebec/In-province).

c. Campus

Of the respondents, a total of 105 indicated that their primary campus was Macdonald Campus (6.1%), while the other 1625 respondents indicated that their primary campus was the Downtown Campus (93.9%). It should be noted that all students were divided into campuses based on the two primary McGill campuses: Downtown and MacDonald. All McGill-affiliated buildings (MUHC Glenn site, Montreal General Hospital, IRCM) were considered as extensions of downtown campus for the purposes of this survey.

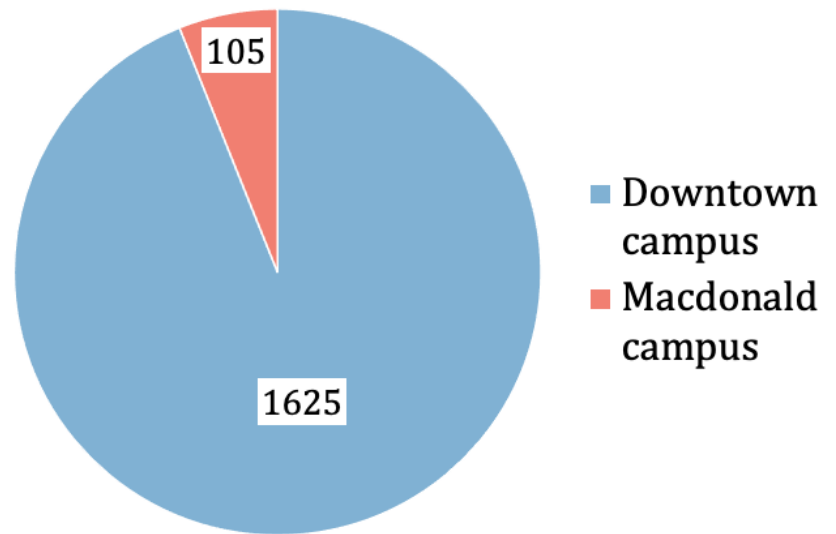


Figure 4: Primary campus of respondents.

Chart shows number of students whose degree work is based at McGill's Downtown or Macdonald Campuses.

d. Gender

A total of 515 of survey respondents identified as men (35.2%), 894 identified as women (61.1%), and 51 identified as non-binary (3.5%). Three survey respondents identified as transgender women, and one respondent identified as questioning.

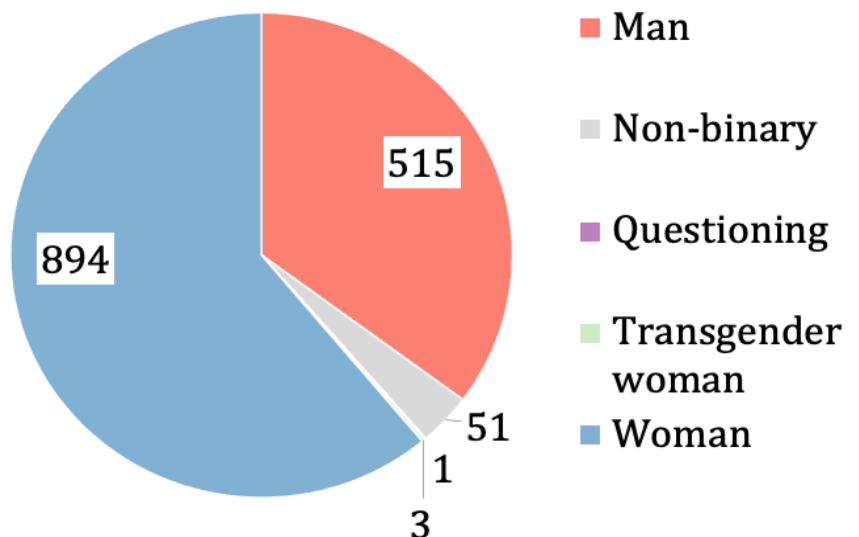


Figure 5: Reported gender of respondents.

Chart shows number of students who identify as: Men, Women, Non-Binary, Questioning, or Transgender Women.

e. Racial demographics

A total of 52 survey respondents identified as Arab (3.7%), 111 as Biracial or Mixed-Race (7.8%), 43 as Black (3.0%), 1 as Caribbean (0.07%), 186 as East-Asian (13.1%), 37 as Jewish (2.6%), 90 as Latin American (6.3%), 1 as Mediterranean (0.07%), 1 as Métis (0.07%), 184 as South Asian (13.0%), 37 as Southeast Asian (2.6%), 99 as West-Asian (7.0%), and 609 as White (42.9%).

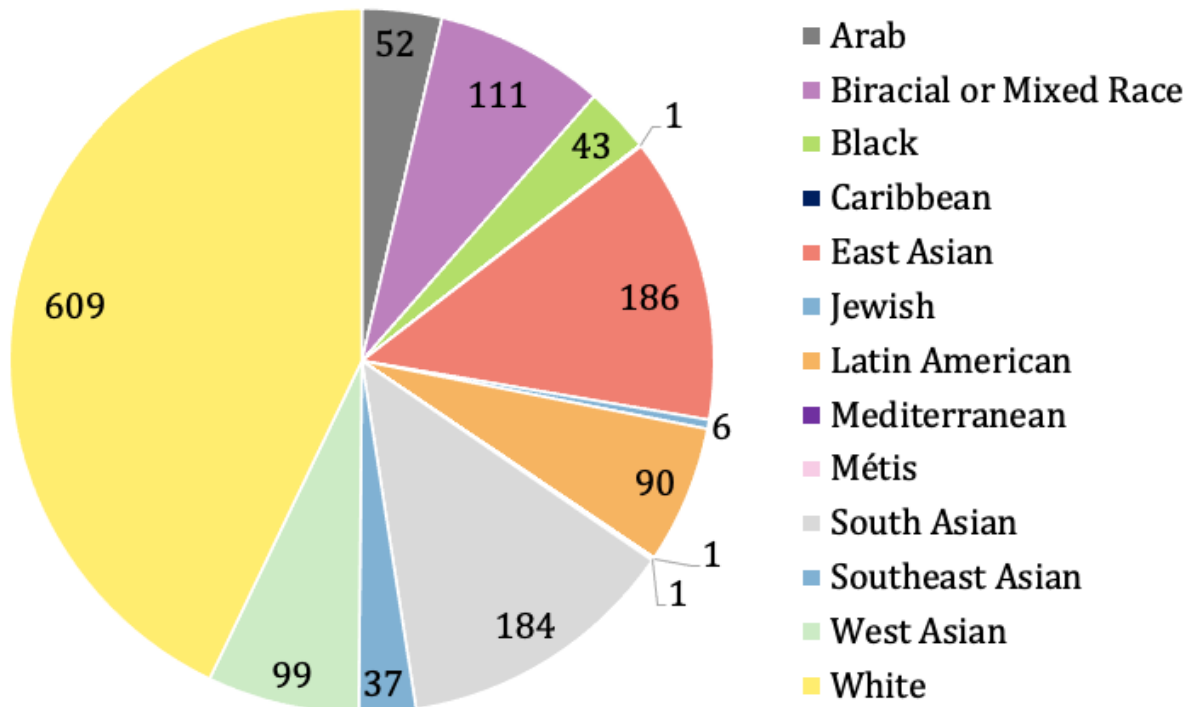


Figure 6: Reported race of respondents. Chart shows number of students who identify as Arab, Biracial/mixed race, Black, Caribbean, East Asian, Jewish, Latin American, Mediterranean, Métis, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, and White.

4. Survey Results

a. Costs incurred by students

Tuition:

“ I requested for any amount of tuition fee waiver as I was struggling to even keep up with daily expenses but after my financial aid assessment I was offered a loan of \$4000 [...] I am still concerned about how to pay my tuition fee next semester. ”

Tuition and university fees often place a significant financial burden on students. Totalling a minimum of several thousand dollars per year, the cost of tuition and fees represent a major financial sink for many students. Tuition and fees are not just required for students taking courses. **Thesis-based graduate students pay tuition not only to take classes, but also to perform research.** Both funded and unfunded individuals find themselves struggling to pay tuition on top of their living expenses. This is especially true for many Canadian/Out-of-Province and International students who pay double or quadruple the cost of Quebec/In-province students¹⁵ (Table 2).

Table 2: The per-semester and total tuition and fees paid during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Master's (thesis)			
	Fall	Winter	Total
Quebec / In-province	2845	2146	4991
Canadian / Out-of-Province	5812	5112	10,924
International	11,648	10,324	21,972
Master's (non-thesis)			
	Fall	Winter	Total
Quebec / In-province	2845	2146	4991
Canadian / Out-of-Province	5812	5112	10,924
International*	\$15,576	14,253	\$29,828
PhD			
	Fall	Winter	Total
Quebec / In-province	2845	2146	4991
Canadian / Out-of-Province	2845	2146	4991
International	10,667	9,343	20,010

* The value for International Master's (non-thesis) tuition changes depending on when the student began their studies. The values above reflect those for a student beginning in Fall 2022.

¹⁵ As per: <https://www.mcgill.ca/student-accounts/tuition-charges/fallwinter-term-tuition-and-fees/graduate-fees>

In Table 2, the values for Quebec/In-Province students, Canadian/Out-of-Province students, and International students are shown for the Master's (thesis), Master's (non-thesis) and PhD level.

To accurately assess the financial health of students, understanding the financial impact of tuition and fees was essential. Just under half of respondents (47.8%) indicated that they have faced difficulties paying tuition **at least** once. Of this group, 27.0% indicated that they have had trouble paying tuition multiple times. McGill tuition payments are due prior to the start of each academic term. When these are not paid in full by this deadline, students are charged 1.24% per month on the existing balance¹⁶. Eligible McGill students can request a tuition fee deferral, whereby they have an extension on tuition and fee payment¹⁷. From our survey, **51.1 % of respondents reported having to request a deferral**. From this group, 14.6% of survey respondents have requested a deferral once, and 36.5% reported requesting a deferral multiple times.

Other academic costs:

“ For fieldwork, I applied for a faculty award - but my department itself was only going to give me 6% (yes, 6%!!!) of the amount of money I needed to cover my fieldwork fees. Fieldwork was mandatory for my thesis research ”

After they begin their program, many graduate students are surprised to learn there can be thousands of dollars per year of other out-of-pocket academic expenses including printing, computer hardware and software, research materials, publication fees, conference registration fees, travel expenses, and membership fees for scientific organizations. Those additional expenses are often not mentioned in funding offer letters or in the financial planning tools on McGill's website. When such an unexpected expense occurs, students in a precarious financial situation must either delay their research, which could jeopardize their graduation, or carry those costs on their personal credit card, which could have significant interest charges. Some of those expenses are reimbursed by McGill, but the process to do so is opaque and often takes months. Many students do not receive financial compensation for academic expenses, forcing them to pay out of pocket.

¹⁶ As per: <https://www.mcgill.ca/student-accounts/your-account/deadlines-and-penalties/overdue>

¹⁷ As per: [https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2023-](https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2023-2024/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gps_gi_fees_sponsorship_funding_deferral#:~:text=Students%20may%20apply%20for%20a,self%20reported%20their%20situation%20accurately.)

[2024/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gps_gi_fees_sponsorship_funding_deferral#:~:text=Students%20may%20apply%20for%20a,self%20reported%20their%20situation%20accurately.](https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2023-2024/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gps_gi_fees_sponsorship_funding_deferral#:~:text=Students%20may%20apply%20for%20a,self%20reported%20their%20situation%20accurately.)

24% of respondents had none of their academic expenses covered by their department or supervisor. 67% of students indicated that they received some degree of financial support for conference-related fees. However, less than 50% of students reported receiving some degree of funding from their supervisor or department for publication fees (36%), materials (33%), software (32%), technology (27%), data access (22%), or fieldwork (16%).

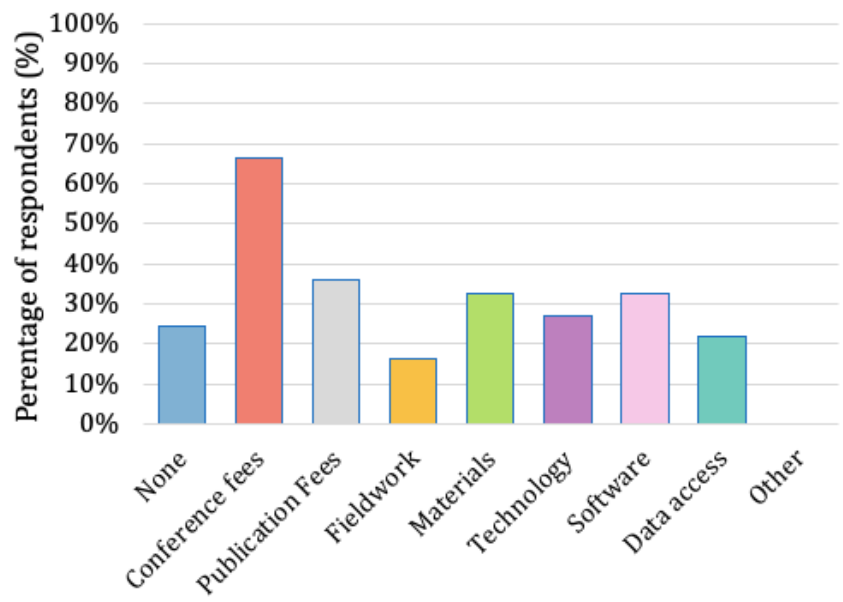
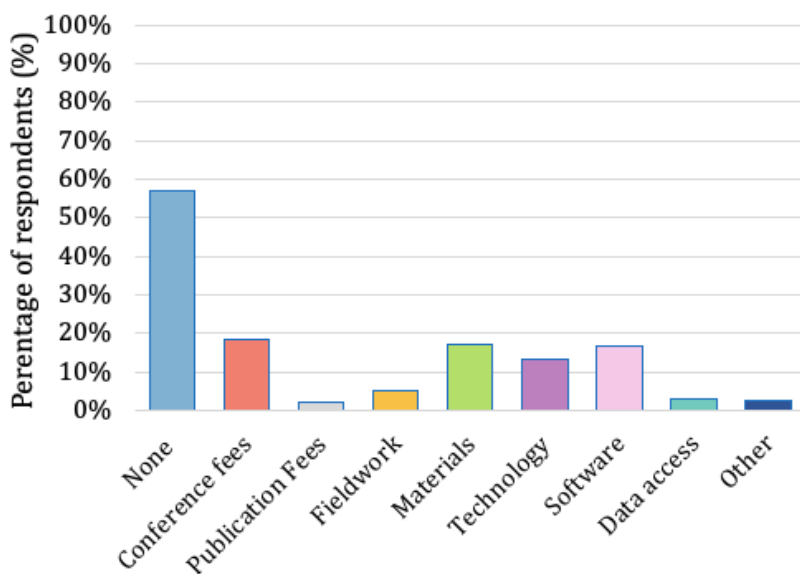


Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who were given financial support for academic expenses. The chart shows the percentage of respondents who were given financial support for conference fees, publication fees, fieldwork, materials, technology, software, data access, (or none of the above).



Many students reported having to spend money from their stipends on academic expenses (without reimbursement). Notably, 18% reported spending their own money on conferences, 17% reported spending their own money on materials, 17% spent their own money on software and 13% spent money on technology without being reimbursed.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who have paid out-of-pocket for academic expenses. The chart shows the percentage of respondents who paid for conference fees, publication fees, fieldwork, materials, technology, software, data access, (or none of the above), without reimbursement.

Inadequate support for academic expenses leaves some students missing out. 30% of respondents reported that they have given up academic opportunities from a lack of funding. 22% of respondents indicated that they missed out on conference opportunities over the past year as they could not pay for fees out of pocket. Fewer students reported being unable to purchase software (9%), technology (8%), materials (5%), pay publication fees (4%), or complete fieldwork (4%).

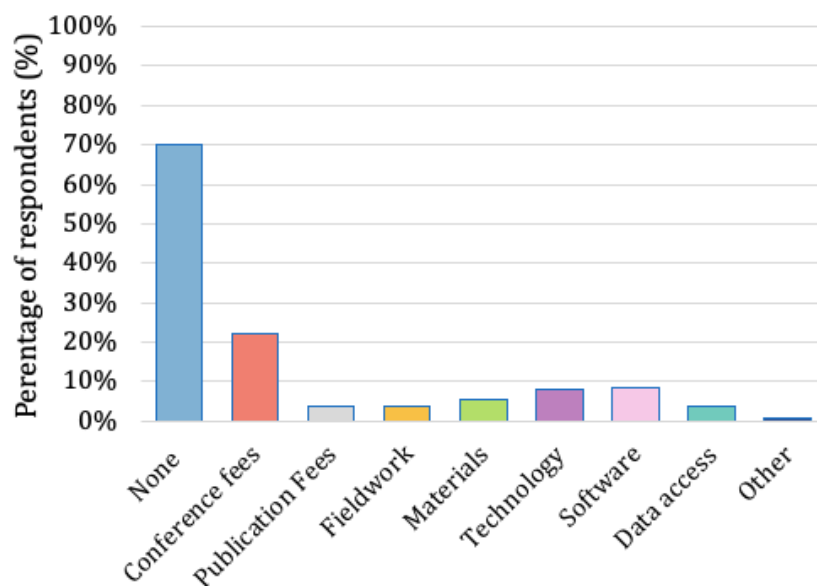


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who have been prevented from accessing resources or attending academic activities due to lack of funding. The chart shows the percentage of respondents whose funding limited their ability to attend conferences, fieldwork or access materials, technology, software, or data.

Cost of living:

The increase in the cost of living is a growing concern. As prices for rent, food, toiletries, cleaning supplies, clothing, and public transit increase, many students are forced to forgo these necessities due to insufficient funds. Making these sacrifices can have serious repercussions on the health and quality of life of students.

A major area of concern is the rising price of groceries. The price of groceries in Quebec went up 11% between 2021 to 2022¹⁸. Between August of 2022 and 2023 in Quebec, the price of food increased 8.2%, corresponding with an 11.7% increase in the price of

¹⁸ As per: https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada's%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf

vegetables, 5.3% for fruit, 5.6% for dairy products, 6.9% for bakery items, and 9.8% for meat¹⁹.

In this section, we asked survey respondents to report their monthly costs relating to rent, groceries, utilities, transportation, and medical expenses. It should be noted that we tried to control for data quality. We attributed some responses to misreading of the survey questions. When asked to report **monthly** rent, 121 students reported spending \$5000 or more. We attributed those responses as readers misinterpreting the question as annual rent. Thus, the 121 values above \$5000 were divided by 12.

The students surveyed spend, on average, \$1631.2 per month on essential cost-of-living expenses. However, common expenses related to debt payments, phone bills, clothing, personal hygiene, and insurance have not been included. Therefore, the monthly expenses calculated are a conservative estimate, and the actual values are likely much higher (**Figure 10**).

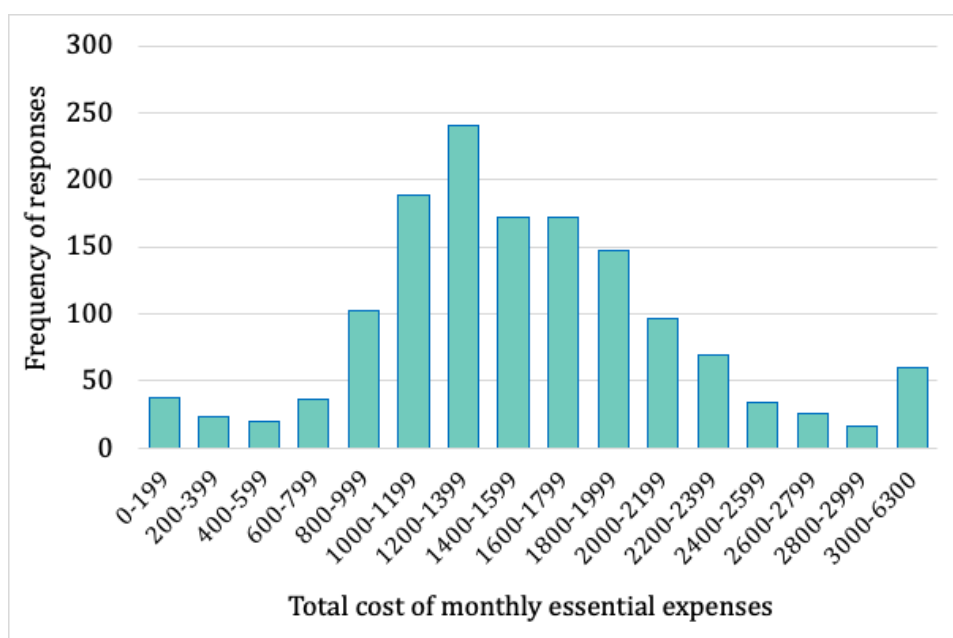


Figure 10: The total monthly cost of living expenses for survey respondents. The graph shows the number of respondents whose monthly cost fell within each cost category between \$0 and \$6300. The cost-of-living expenses include rent, groceries, utilities, transportation, and medical expenses.

Most students (65.5%) reported spending between \$1000 and \$1999 per month on essential cost of living expenses. This corresponds to between \$12,000 and \$23,988 **annually**. The average cost of each individual expense (rent, utilities, groceries,

¹⁹ Statistics Canada. Table 18-10-0004-03 Consumer Price Index, monthly, percentage change, not seasonally adjusted, Canada, provinces, Whitehorse and Yellowknife — Food. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1810000401-eng>

transportation and medical) is summarized in **Table 2**. The values reported for the 2020-2021 survey are compared against those reported in the 2022-2023 survey.

Table 3: Monthly cost-of-living expenses for graduate students.

Expense	Average 2022-2023 survey	Average 2020-2021 survey	Median 2022-2023 survey
Rent	\$983	\$726	\$900
Groceries	\$400	\$347	\$350
Transportation	\$85	\$168	\$56
Utilities	\$148	-	\$120
Medical	\$136	\$163	\$75
Total	\$1752	-	-

Table 3 shows the average cost of rent, groceries, transportation, utilities, and medical expenses from both the 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 PGSS Graduate Surveys. All values are reported for only respondents who pay expenses (after removal of respondents that paid \$0 per expense). The median of each expense is also shown, excluding respondents who do not pay expenses.

Table 3 shows that the **monthly** average rent paid in 2022 is \$257 more than it was in 2020. This represents a \$3084 increase in annual rent. The **monthly** price of groceries has also increased – from \$347 to \$400, \$53 more than in 2020. Students reported spending less on transportation and medical expenses in 2022-2023 than in 2020-2021.

a. Rent

“The rapid rent inflation meant that half of my stipend was spent on rent. In the end, I had to move away from McGill and find a roommate to be in an affordable situation. I now commute an hour a day by bus and metro rather than walk 20 minutes. It's draining.”

Per month, students reported \$983 (when we remove responses for students who pay no rent). This average is over \$200 more than the PGSS survey findings in 2020 (\$726 on monthly rent). Over half of students, report spending between \$500 and \$1099 on rent monthly.

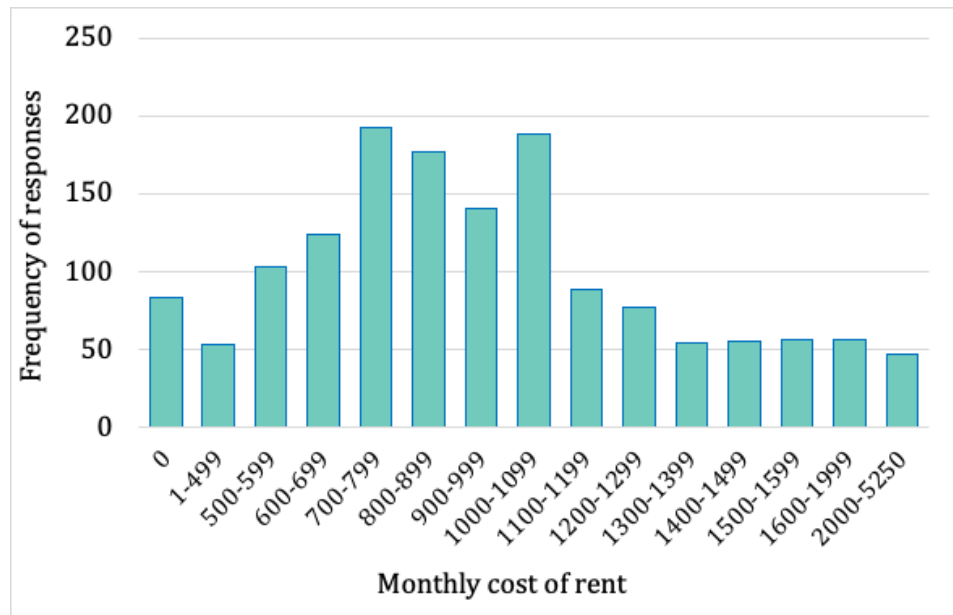


Figure 11: Monthly cost of rent. The graph shows the number of respondents whose rent fell within each cost category between \$0 and \$5250.

b. Groceries

“ I am very unstable in case of an emergency, and will not be able financially stable if something was to happen. My frugal nature allows me to be in this stable condition, but the forced frugality, due to limited income, does seem to take a toll on my body. ”

Students reported spending an average of \$400 on groceries monthly. This average is nearly \$53 more than the average from our 2020 survey (\$347). Most respondents (over 76 %) pay between \$200 and \$599 on groceries per month.

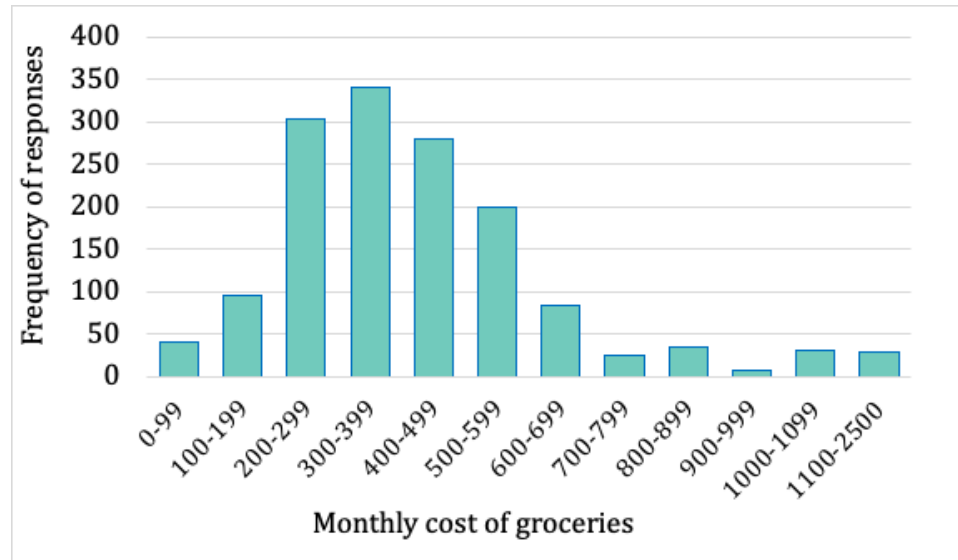


Figure 12: Monthly cost of groceries. The graph shows the number of respondents whose monthly groceries fell within each cost category between \$0 and \$2500.

c. Other essential expenses

In addition to rent and groceries, we also asked students about their spending on utilities, transportation and medical expenses. Monthly, students reported spending an average of \$148 on utilities, \$85 on transportation and \$136 on health-related expenses.

Funding:

“My student stipend is not sufficient to cover my rent plus school fees, I’m currently still paying out of some savings from internships from my undergraduate years and some support from family.”

Funding practices vary across McGill, both within faculties and departments. While some programs offer guaranteed funding, many programs require their students to financially support themselves through awards or academic employment. For this section, student funding includes internal and external awards, stipends from supervisors, internships, and practicums, but excludes academic employment (teaching assistantships, research assistantships, lecturing, and tutoring), or non-academic employment since those reflect additional labour above and beyond full-time studies.

We would like to introduce an important piece of information to keep in mind while reading the findings this section. As of May 1st 2023, the minimum wage in Quebec is \$15.25 per hour. Statistics Canada found that in 2022, the average Canadian worked 39.3

hours per week²⁰. Therefore, minimum-wage earner in Quebec working 39 hours per week will earn approximately \$29, 280 annually. When we subtract federal and provincial income taxes from this value, **the average minimum wage full-time worker in Quebec makes \$23,642 annually.**

First, we evaluated how many students were funded or non-funded. 17.0% of respondents received no funding for their studies, while 83.0% received funding. The number of students receiving funding varied between degree programs, with 90% of PhD students receiving funding, but only 43% of Master's (non-thesis) students receiving funding **(Figure 13).**

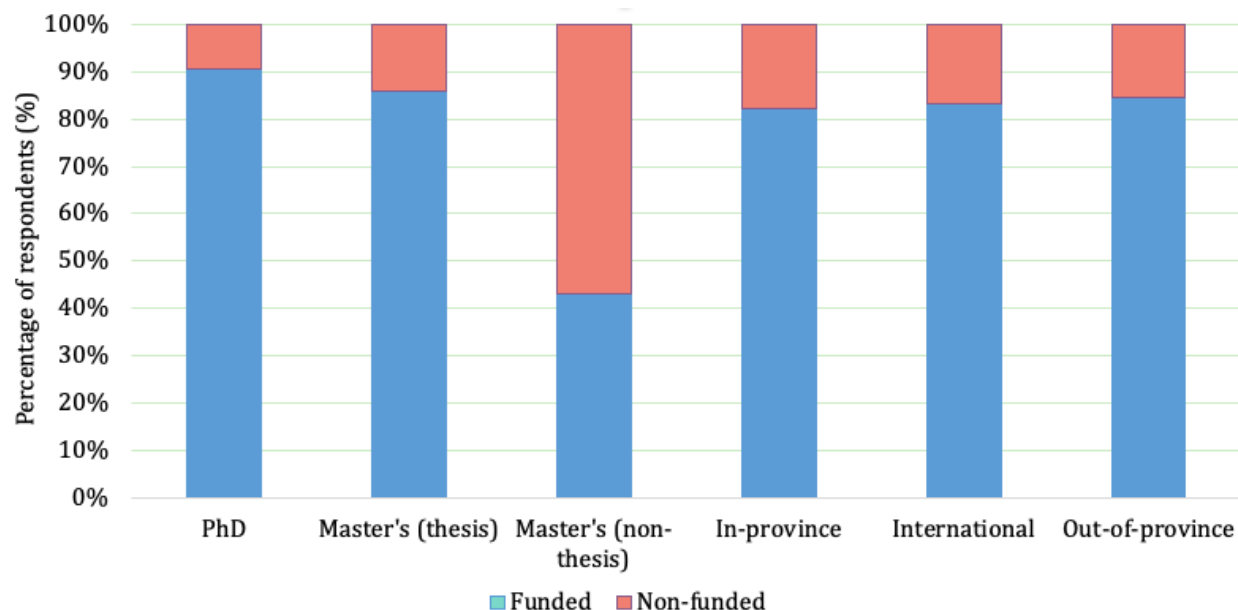


Figure 13: Percentage of respondents that reported receiving funding. The percentage of funded students (blue) and non-funded students (red) are shown for all degree levels (PhD, Master's-thesis, Master's-non-thesis) and residencies (In-Province, International, Out-of-Province).

Next, we wanted to determine (1) the value of money that funded students are earning and (2) the contributions of each funding source towards student funding. We asked students to indicate the amount of money they received from external funding, internal funding, or stipends (supervisor or internship) **(Figure 14, Table 4).**

²⁰ Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0043-01. Average usual and actual hours worked in a reference week by type of work \(full- and part-time\), annual.](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410004301-eng) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410004301-eng>

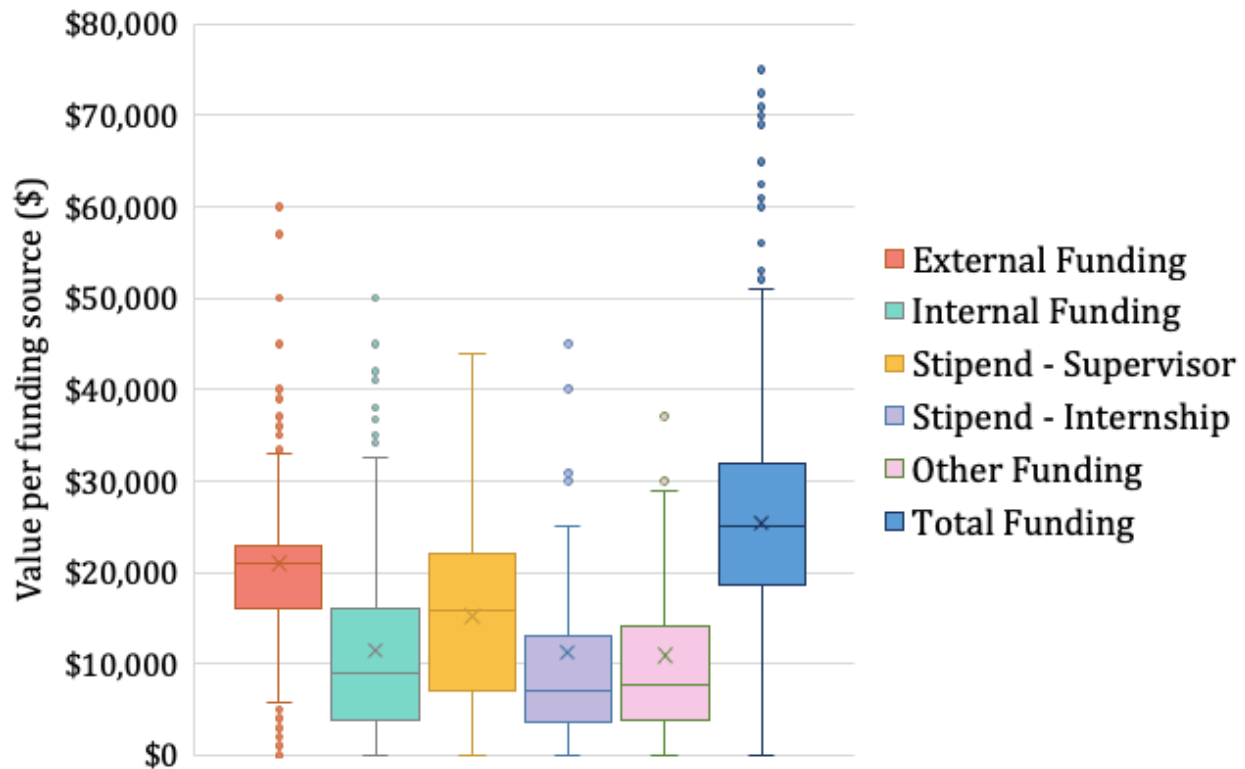


Figure 14: Value of total funding and contributions of funding sources. Box and Whiskers graph showing the distribution of total funding, as well as the value of external funding, internal funding, and stipends (supervisor and internship) earned by students. Two points extend past the axis: two respondents reported over \$80,000 in total funding).

Of the students who indicated that they received funding, 36% received external funding (\$20,972 average), 62% received internal funding (\$11,359 average), 65% received a stipend from their supervisor (\$15,189 average), 4% received funding from an internship (\$11,267 average) and 5% received some form of other funding (\$10,896 average). **The total average funding value for all funded graduate students was \$25,310.**

Table 4: The funding received by students at all degree levels.

Level	External Awards	Internal Awards	Stipend - Supervisor	Stipend-Internship	Total
Master's (non-thesis)	\$19,408 (±\$19,437, n=19)	\$6856 (±\$6225, n=41)	\$7656 (±\$5380, n=8)	\$6167 (±\$3498, n=15)	\$4452 (±\$9654, n=212)
					\$11,948 (±\$12,705, n=79)
Master's (thesis)	\$14,205 (±\$6679, n=105)	\$7738 (±\$6229, n=244)	\$17,094 (±\$8370, n=318)	\$12,090 (±\$9572, n=14)	\$17,012 (±\$12,738, n=531)
					\$22,195 (±\$9823, n=407)
PhD	\$23,155 (±\$10,578, n=335)	\$13,470 (±\$10,636, n=506)	\$14,105 (±\$8936, n=503)	\$15,089 (±\$15,804, n=17)	\$22,871 (±\$15,418, n=980)
					\$28,238 (±\$11,918, n=794)

The table shows the average value of external awards, internal awards, stipends (from supervisors and internships) and total funding. The average (bolded), standard deviation, and sample size (n) are all shown. The values within the “Total” cells include both the average values of funded and unfunded students (top) and average values of exclusively funded students (bottom).

The average amount of funding received per faculty, degree level and residency were highly variable (both between and within groups). Generally, Master's (non-thesis) students received the lowest funding. Surprisingly, despite paying higher tuition, the survey results revealed that generally International students do not receive drastically higher funding than Quebec/In-province or Canadian/Out-of-province students (**Figure 15**).

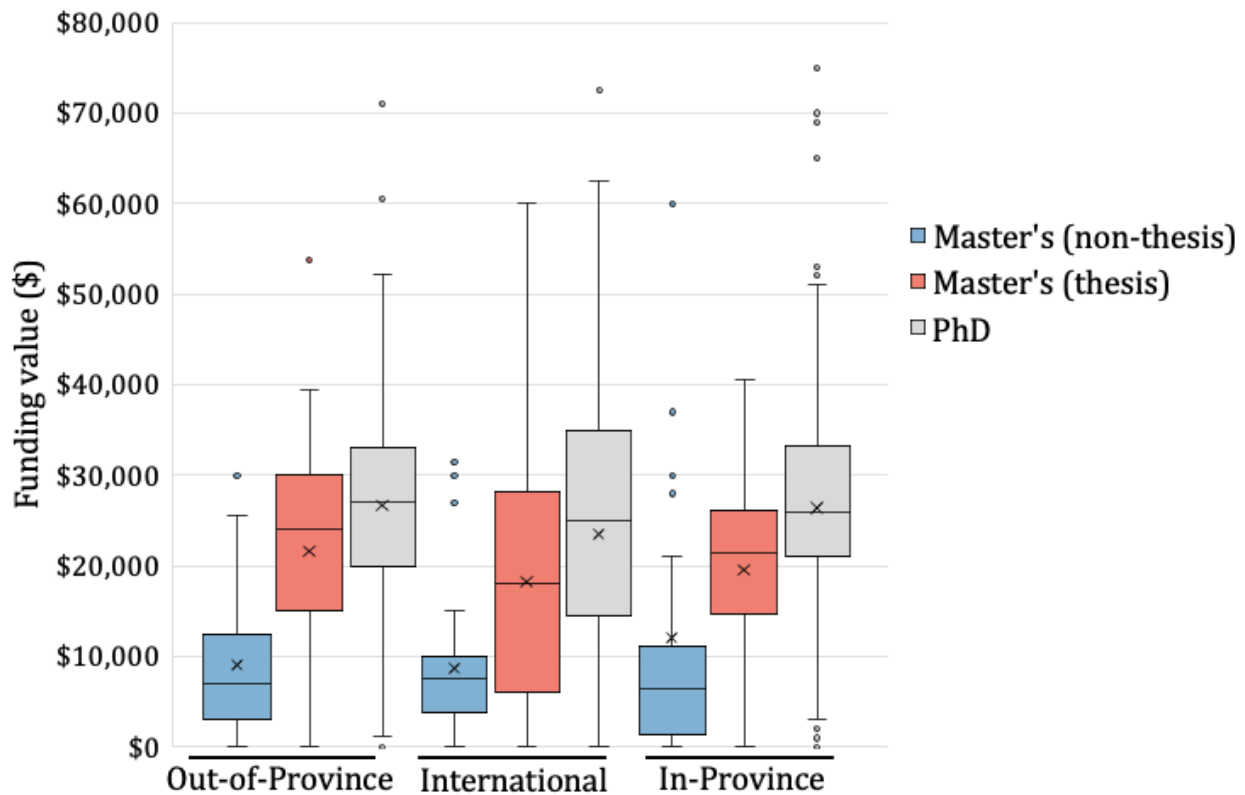


Figure 15: Funding values per degree level. Box and Whiskers plot showing the overall funding values of students from each degree level, (Master's- non-thesis, Master's-thesis, and PhD) and residency (Quebec/In-Province, Canadian/Out-of-Province, and International). One data point extend past the axis: one respondent (In-Province, PhD) reported their funding amount as greater than \$80,000).

Academic employment

“Our program was funded only for the first four years, where any additional work done (TA/RA) reduced the funding package by the equivalent amount. No university funding for the fifth year made things tough. Taking additional on-campus jobs to support oneself takes productive time away from research.”

Many graduate students hold academic employment at McGill. Academic employees include Teaching Assistants (TAs), Research Assistants (RAs), course lecturers, workshop facilitators, invigilators, and graders. It is important to note that RAs do not include research which is part of a thesis-based program. It encompasses research that is outside of

a student's degree-related project. Academic employment can act as a supplement to existing funding or may be a student's only source of financial support during the duration of their degree. The results of the survey indicate that 28.9% of students are **required** to hold academic employment as an addition to their degree work. 15.5% of respondents are required to hold academic employment to receive all or part of their base funding, and 7.4% are required to hold academic employment, but the salary from this employment is received in addition to their base salary. Most students (71.1%) are not required to hold academic employment as part of their departmental requirements.

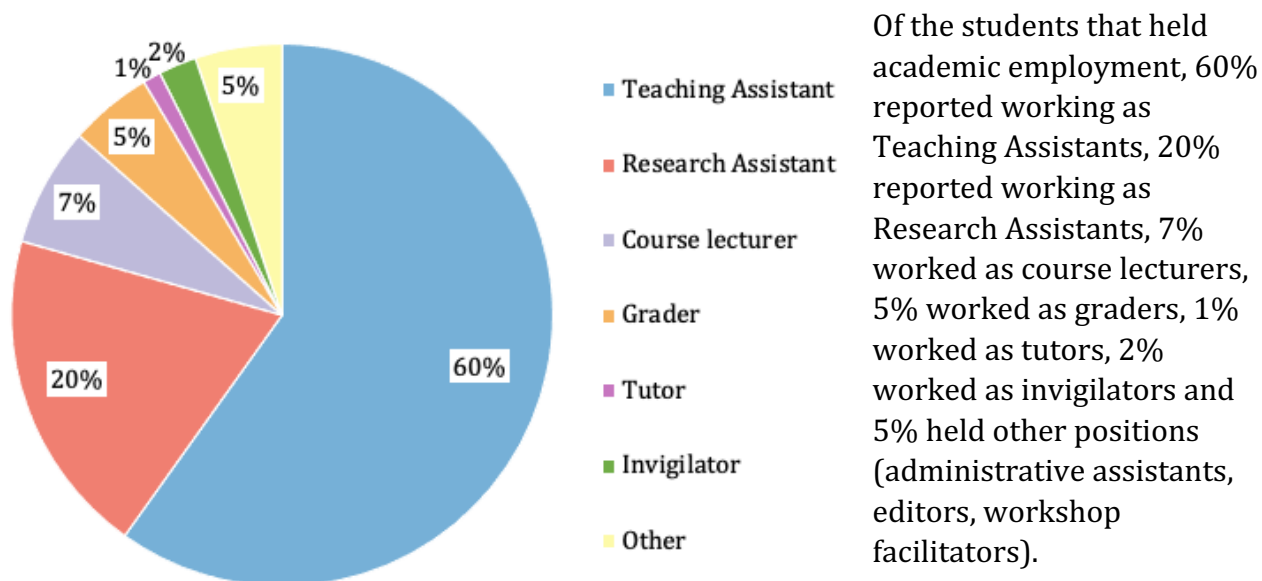


Figure 16: Percentage of students who reported holding academic employment. Pie chart showing the percentage of students who reported being employed as TAs, RAs, course lecturers, graders, tutors, or invigilators.

Each faculty had varying rates of academic employment. For a faculty-by-faculty breakdown, see our individual reports (pg. 34). While most students earn less than \$10,000 from academic employment per year, this money often represents a major component of their income (**Figure 17**).

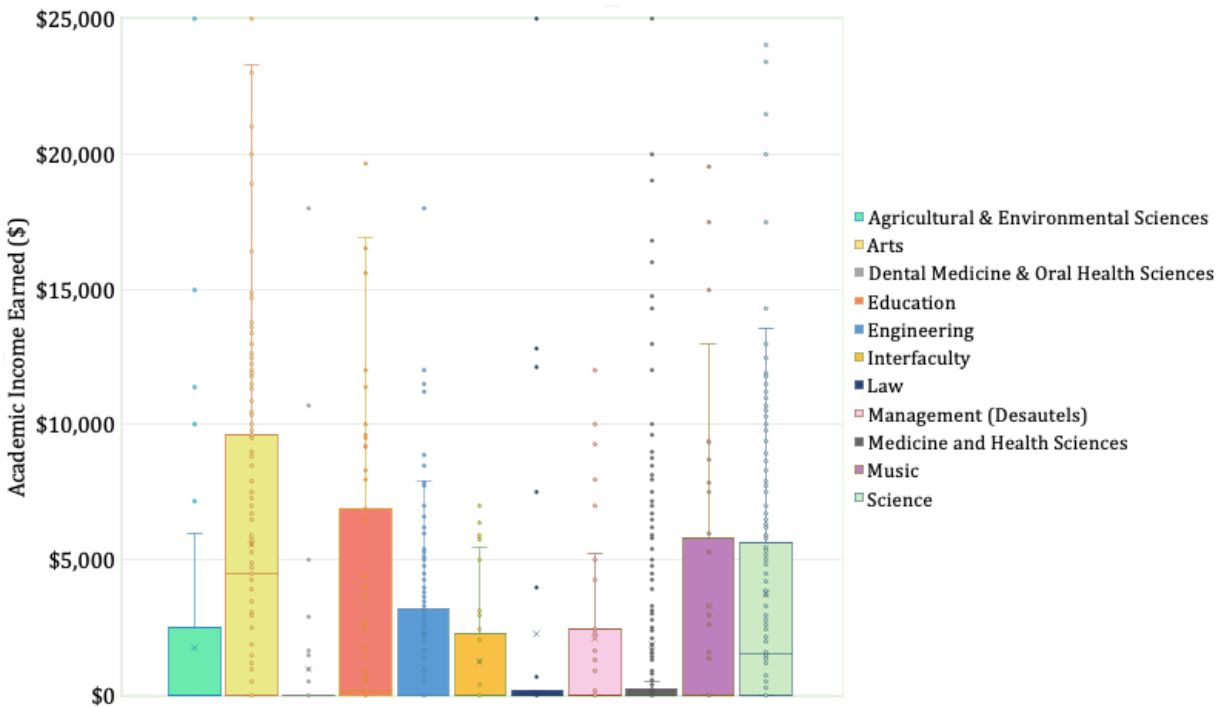


Figure 17: Total income from academic employment. Box and Whiskers plot showing the total academic income earned by respondents in each faculty. Ten respondents extend above the axis, including five points from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, three for Science, one for Education and one for Arts (ranging from \$30,000 to \$119,000).

Take-home Income

The following section discusses the total income that students receive after deduction of tuition and other mandatory academic expenses. We found that **the average McGill graduate student takes home only \$11,981 per year**. For comparison, a full-time minimum-wage worker in Quebec takes home \$23,642 per year. The IRIS estimated that the minimum take-home pay for Montreal residents to be financially sustainable in 2023 is \$32,252⁸. **71.9% of McGill graduate students make less than a full-time minimum-wage worker, and 88.3% make less than a sustainable income (Figure 18).**

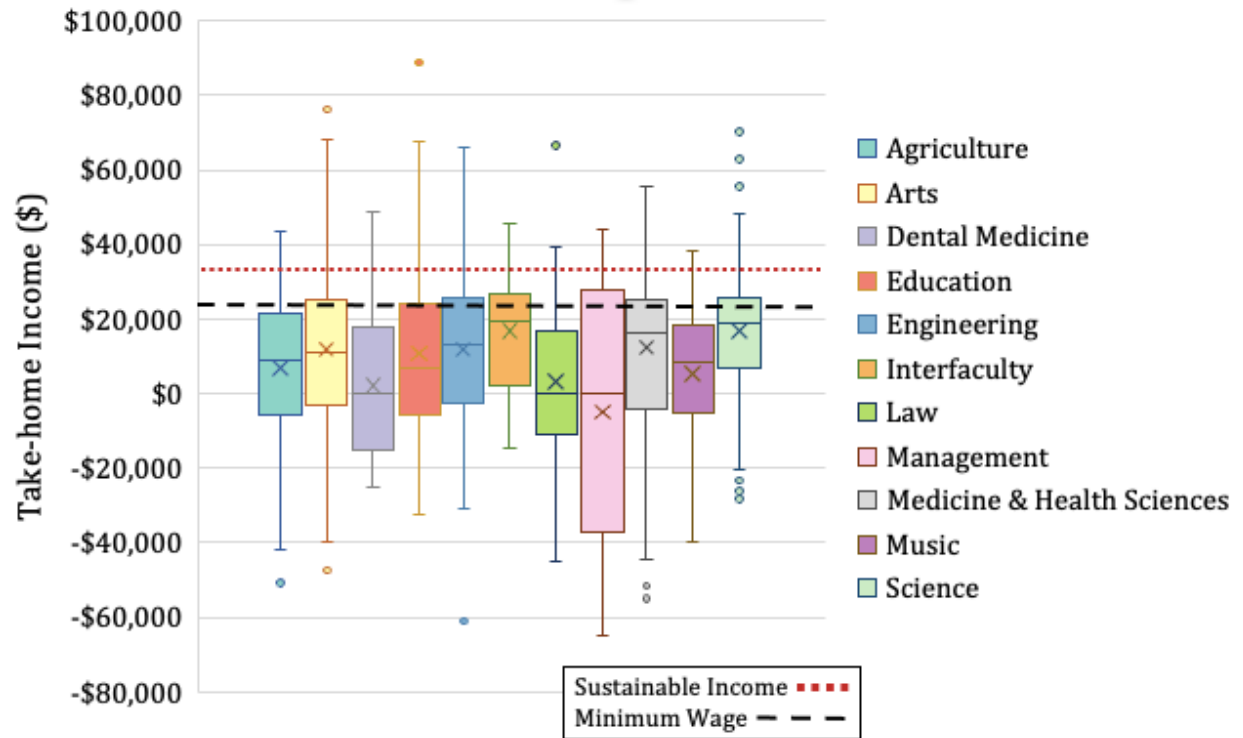


Figure 18: Take-home income of graduate students per faculty. Box and Whiskers plot showing the distributions of take-home income of students from each faculty. The “Sustainable Income” line (dotted red line) denotes the \$32,252 IRIS financially sustainable value, and the “Minimum Wage” line (black line) denotes the \$23,642 minimum wage amount.

Table 5: Summary of take-home income of graduate student respondents.

Faculty	Average (\$/year)	Standard deviation (\$/year)	1st quartile (\$/year)	Median (\$/year)	3rd quartile (\$/year)
Agriculture	\$6,927	\$19,295	-\$5,650	\$8,700	\$21,400
Arts	\$11,701	\$21,255	-\$3,267	\$11,100	\$25,311
Dentistry	\$2,252	\$19,055	-\$14,729	-\$100	\$16,890
Education	\$10,660	\$23,420	-\$5,797	\$7,109	\$23,802
Engineering	\$11,847	\$18,917	-\$2,509	\$13,308	\$25,525
Interfaculty	\$16,740	\$15,260	\$3,650	\$19,410	\$26,022
Law	\$3,272	\$24,384	-\$10,058	\$0	\$15,394
Management	-\$4,813	\$32,370	-\$36,944	\$0	\$26,707
Medicine	\$12,402	\$20,489	-\$3,927	\$16,048	\$25,001
Science	\$16,693	\$15,826	\$6,998	\$19,148	\$25,441
Total	\$11,981	\$20,110	-\$2,597	\$14,912	\$24,821

For each faculty, table 5 shows the average and standard deviation of respondent take-home incomes. The median of the incomes is also shown along with 1st and 3rd quartile values. The median represents the midpoint of the data, whereas the 1st quartile is the midpoint between the lowest data point and the median, and the 3rd quartile is the midpoint between the median and the highest data point.

Next, we wanted to assess the overall financial health of students. We asked students to state their relative financial security. Over half of the students surveyed (52%) reported facing moderate to severe financial insecurity with 18% of students indicating that they were very financially insecure. 68% of students reported that they face food insecurity **at least** several times a month, with 12% facing food insecurity every day (**Figure 19**). Due to insufficient funds, 10% of students reported having to reduce or forego necessary medication and 33% of students were forced to delay or forego mental health treatment.

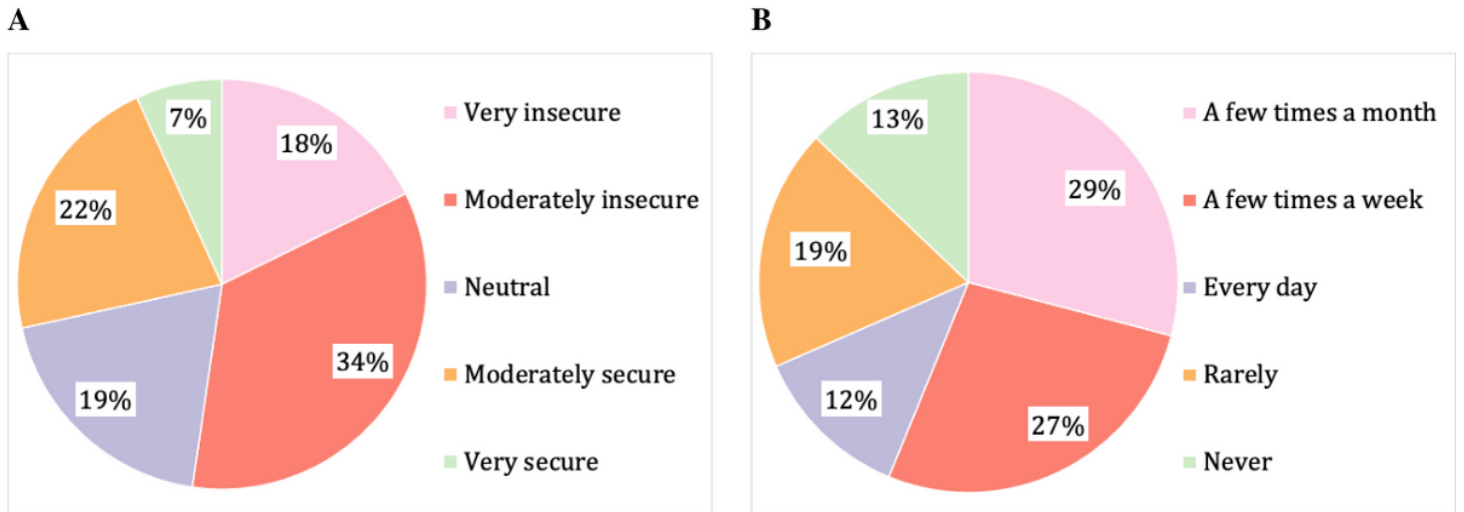


Figure 19: Financial security and food security of graduate student respondents. (A) The self-reported financial security of students and (B) The relative food security of students. Data labels represent percentages.

5. Testimonials of students

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to share any further thoughts or concerns on funding. From this qualitative data, we found five themes to be most prevalent. It is clear that McGill funding has severely impacted the lives of many students in profoundly negative ways. Several students express both short-term difficulties they face with funding but also discuss how they expect the financial strain of their graduate degree to impact them for the rest of their lives. The five main themes are:

- a. Graduate students at McGill find that the current funding is inadequate to live with dignity. When students try to increase their funding via awards, they often are not granted any increase.

“*The stipend of around \$30,000/year is not enough to live in Montreal for 5 years (PhD). I have won NSERC CGS-M and FRQNT master's & doctoral scholarships, and it was only after I won those awards that I learned that it would not be extra on top of the stipend provided by my supervisor/department. This was disappointing. The only benefit was that I no longer need to TA [...] It feels more like I won the scholarships for McGill's financial benefit rather than my own, since earning the scholarships means that McGill no longer has the financial burden of paying most of my stipend.*”

- b. The state of graduate funding at McGill has had profound effects on many students' physical and mental health.

“*We are adults with families and responsibilities, but also are considered students in terms of payments. In order to produce quality data the amount of work and hours we devoted are sometimes above 60 hours a week and really not compensated by the \$20000 annual living allowances (in addition to paying off my tuition). Working extra hours is a nature of the work we do, and it is what it is. But also there is only minimum time left for us to even cook for let alone taking care of ourselves. Just as an example, I have lived off peanut butter and jam sandwiches as breakfasts and lunches for the past five semesters. [...] Living in Montreal with \$20,000/year, having to "work" full-time, pay rent, groceries, without any additional food or living support really means us grad students have to sacrifice quality of life to an extreme.*”

- c. Students are at a disadvantage in conversations about funding. Asking for the minimum stipend can cause conflict with their supervisor (someone who controls the short-term and long-term opportunities of their students).

“It was only this year that my supervisor was “advised” by the university to top up students with external fundings. Prior to this students could never expect anything so there was little incentive to apply for awards other than adding one extra line to the CV. I tried asking my PI, but because I was already the highest paying student he has (by external funding, PI paid zero for three years straight), he was unwilling to top me up. I’m glad the increase in funding is pushed through finally, but it’s still severely lagging behind some other universities, especially with the insane increase in living expenses. Montreal is no longer that much more affordable a city. With the millions of dollars McGill boasts of fundraising every year, little seems to trickle down to the actual student body. McGill’s TA rate is also much lower than other major universities and without any benefit.”

- d. McGill administrative errors and late payment severely impact students.

“I’m supposed to get paid on the 1st of every month, but McGill’s payments usually only come through two to three days late. If I didn’t have a line of credit, I’d be screwed to pay my rent.”

“It has been a nightmare. My supervisor always processes our stipend a month late, so we always have to manage the first month of the semester without getting paid. As an international student, the first year and a half of my degree, I had to put money into studying because my stipend didn't cover my tuition fees, so I had to pay for them and my living expenses on my own. I have spent more than 8 hours working in my wet lab regularly and it crushes my spirits that I am not even making minimum wage and that undergraduate SURE students make more money in 3-4 months of work than I do as a graduate student in a whole semester. This is why I won't keep pursuing graduate studies. Supervisors don't care about the financial situation of their students and expect them to work long hours and until the end of the degree without proper compensation.”

- e. Many students feel under-supported and find the funding system confusing and non-transparent.

“My department has changed how the base funding package is disbursed every single year I have been a student and has never provided an explanation as to why the change has occurred or what we can expect to be responsible for in terms of paying tuition and fees. In my first year, my tuition and fees were paid directly by the department. In my second and third years, I was given a [Differential Fee Waiver] and covered the fees from a stipend that was paid directly to me. This year I did not receive a DFW and have been responsible for paying all tuition and fees directly from the department's monthly payments (which has meant I needed to defer tuition payments and pay in installments as the department disburses my funding in monthly installments between September and April). I would truly love for them to send a breakdown of funding and how it will be paid every year so that I know what to expect from my tuition bills and don't panic when suddenly the bill is drastically different from previous terms because of a change that was not made clear to me.”

5. Recommendations

Given the data presented in this report, the PGSS Funding Working Group proposes the following recommendations:

1. We ask McGill Principal and Vice Chancellor Deep Saini:
 - a. To ensure that all thesis-based Master's and PhD students have a **minimum** funding (after tuition and **exclusive of labor wages**) above the Quebec minimum wage of \$23,642 to reflect the high-quality research that they perform.
 - b. To **form funding-centered faculty-student committees** within graduate departments whose mandate is to provide a forum to discuss student funding, to explore options for improving the current financial compensation system for graduate students, and to increase transparency within departmental finances.

2. We ask McGill Dean of Students *Robin Beech*:
 - a. To work within the administration of McGill to make university-wide improvements to the disbursement system of funding:
 - i. All students should receive their payments within three business days of the date specified in the disbursement schedule.
 - ii. All students should be reimbursed for their out-of-pocket research expenses (such as conferences), within one month of filing for reimbursement.
3. We ask the McGill Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Josephine Nalbantoglu:
 - a. To implement a new funding letter which clearly states the student's funding sources and disbursement schedule, rules **regarding top-ups** and rollbacks, average time required to complete program, as well as expected tuition, fees, insurance, and **out-of-pocket research costs**. Students should receive an updated letter each year to keep them informed of changes.
 - b. To better regulate the departmental rules on the top-up amounts received by students from external and internal awards, ensuring that students receive a top-up of **10% of their award**. Despite spending time and energy on lengthy scholarship applications, many departments do not mandate an increase to student stipends (or top-up) from awards. After working on an application and winning scholarships, many students find themselves still earning the minimum stipend.

Concluding remarks

Improving its financial support of graduate students benefits both McGill and the larger academic community. Under the current system, many very talented and qualified students are unable to pursue (or finish) graduate studies given the financial constraints placed on them. McGill graduate students are actively outputting work, playing pivotal roles in Canadian science, arts, business, and engineering industries. McGill prides itself in the high level of work within its campuses. By lessening the financial burdens placed upon its student workers, it can increase both the caliber of students and the academic contributions of the University. For generations, McGill has prided itself on being a ***national leader*** in research and academics. Yet funding advancements are happening in universities across the country, and McGill is falling behind.

We present this report as an important preliminary step to strengthening the graduate student community at McGill. We hope that the information disclosed will generate

discussion between students and McGill administration, and ultimately, lead to productive funding-related changes at the University. We would like to encourage all graduate students to become active in the movement towards better funding. Some simple first steps include speaking to your classmates, labmates and friends about funding. Regularly check your departmental policies on funding values and compare to what you have been paid. Speak up when you notice a problem and ask questions. Funding issues can only be resolved when we understand and track existing and emerging issues.

The authors of this report also acknowledge the actions required at the federal level for supporting improvements to graduate student funding. Currently, graduate and postdoctoral funding opportunities offered by the Tri-Council granting agencies are inadequate. The value of the national Tri-Council awards has remained stagnant since 2003, despite unprecedented increases to inflation⁶. This leaves many graduate students in severe financial stress. The Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System published a report in Winter 2023 designed to advise the federal government on changes needed to improve the research system in Canada. In this report, they acknowledged the importance of improving graduate student wages as part of the building a better system of academic research in Canada.

“Current support for graduate students, the researchers of tomorrow, is at a breaking point. The values of the government's awards for university research trainees have remained virtually stagnant for the past 20 years. As a result, they have not kept pace with increases to the cost of living nor with research trainee compensation trends around the world. This situation has significantly eroded Canada's position as a global hub for the attraction and retention of research-enabled talent and this erosion will be accelerated by the increase in investments by our global peers. As a result, the panel also urges the government to significantly increase funding for students and postdoctoral fellows to an internationally competitive level [...] Given the international competition for talent, Canada is at serious risk of another brain drain without reinvestment.”

This report, while referring to the national-level studentships awarded to graduate students, exemplifies the shortcomings in graduate student funding across the board. Federal scholarships situate students well below the poverty line. Systematic change at both the University and federal levels are urgently needed.

As a final note, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of members of the McGill University community towards improving the funding of graduate students. In July of 2023, McGill Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies submitted a brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research. In their submission, they supported increases to federal graduate student funding programs. Several student-led groups submitted similar briefs to the Federal Government for their pre-budget consultation including Support Our Science, AGSEM and PGSS. Having the support of Universities like

McGill strengthens the call for increasing federal funding. We are excited to see further action taken on behalf of the University towards this cause.

The PGSS is excited to work with students, professors and McGill administration across the university to foster a brighter future for graduate students and their research. For more information questions or concerns, please contact the PGSS University Affairs Officer, uao.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca, the PGSS Funding and Supervision Commissioner, fsc.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca, or the PGSS Funding Working Group pgss.fsc@gmail.com. For our appendix and individual reports with data from each faculty, visit our website:

<https://pgss.mcgill.ca/en/funding-working-group>