




Brief presented to the Standing committee on
science and research

Enhancing the Effectiveness of Canadian Government Scholarships and Fellowships for Graduate Students and Post-Doctoral Researchers

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Introduction:

The Canadian Government's scholarships and fellowships for graduate students and post-doctoral researchers have long been seen as prestigious markers of excellence in academic and research careers. However, the lack of indexation in the value of these awards for the past 20 years has significantly diminished their attractiveness and impact. This brief discusses the urgent need to raise the values of these scholarships and fellowships and proposes two key suggestions to address the issue and enhance their effectiveness.

The absence of indexation in the value of federal scholarships has led to a devaluation of these awards over time due to inflation. As a result, recipients of these scholarships, intended to support Canada's most accomplished graduate students in science, are now earning below the poverty line without any additional means of income. This devaluation has resulted in other scholarships becoming the new standard of excellence, leading to talented students choosing alternative funding options or pursuing opportunities abroad, contributing to a potential brain drain. Additionally, the lack of adequate financial support disproportionately affects underprivileged students from underrepresented groups, further exacerbating systemic barriers they already face.

Suggestion 1: Increase Scholarship and Fellowship Values to Restore Excellence Branding

Re-establishing the prestige associated with the Canadian Graduate Scholarship (CGS) through an increase in its value holds the key to attracting and retaining the most promising researchers in academia and research and innovation careers. Currently, many exceptional students opt for American universities with more generous funding offers, resulting in a brain drain that deprives Canada of its top talent. Moreover, in a highly competitive job market, lucrative opportunities beckon, and without adequate financial support, research and innovation will undoubtedly face a talent depletion. It is essential to recognize that less privileged students from underrepresented groups often struggle to afford graduate studies without sufficient financial assistance, exacerbating existing systemic barriers and hindering their academic pursuits. By elevating the value of the CGS, Canada can create an environment that fosters excellence, encourages talent retention, and paves the way for a

diverse and inclusive research landscape, ensuring that no potential goes untapped due to financial limitations.

Funding Considerations: While increasing the value of scholarships and fellowships is essential to maintain the competitiveness of these awards, it is important to acknowledge the budgetary constraints. A higher value per individual scholarship would mean funding fewer scholarships within the existing budget. However, prioritizing quality over quantity could lead to more impactful research outcomes and support for the most promising students.

To address the potential financial strain on the research community and universities, it is imperative to explore additional sources of funding. One viable solution is a general increase in funding to research agencies. By allocating more resources to research agencies, the government can alleviate the pressure on universities to provide additional financial support to graduate students from research grants and other institutional contributions.

Moreover, increasing funding to research agencies can also strengthen the overall research ecosystem in Canada. A well-funded research community can attract more competitive grants and projects, allowing for increased financial support to graduate students and researchers. In parallel, fostering partnerships between the public and private sectors can create opportunities for additional financial support for graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships. Collaborations with industry partners can lead to sponsorships, endowments, or targeted funding for specific research areas, further enhancing the available resources for these programs. Overall, such investment is critical for Canada's productivity in an international environment that is extremely competitive.

Suggestion 2: Promoting Equitable Distribution of Scholarships: Removing Quotas and Internal Distribution Systems**

1. Increased Freedom of Choice:

Eliminating university quotas and internal distribution systems for scholarships and fellowships would empower recipients to choose institutions based on their research interests and strengths. This increased freedom of choice ensures that talented students can align their academic pursuits with institutions that best support their research goals, fostering a more diverse distribution of research talent across the country.

2. Supporting University Strengths:

The emergence of university strengths, exemplified by institutions receiving the Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF) awards, should be effectively supported by scholarship programs. Allowing these leading institutions to benefit from financial aid would further bolster their cutting-edge research initiatives, driving innovation and excellence in their respective fields.

3. Fostering Inclusivity and Diversity:

Quotas hinder underrepresented groups from considering a wider range of institutions, as they often favor well-established U5 and U15 universities. By removing quotas, the scholarship program becomes more inclusive, encouraging students to explore and choose institutions

based on their research needs and personal aspirations, without being constrained by pre-existing preferences.

4. Strengthening Research Ecosystem:

Eliminating university quotas and internal distribution systems creates a level playing field for all institutions, fostering healthy competition in research and innovation. This stimulates a robust and dynamic research ecosystem, where institutions are encouraged to excel and contribute to Canada's collective research progress.

By removing university quotas and internal distribution systems, the Canadian Government can promote an equitable and diverse distribution of scholarships and fellowships. Students will have the freedom to choose institutions that align with their research interests, fostering collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity in the research landscape. Supporting emerging university strengths and encouraging academic mobility will contribute to a thriving research ecosystem, ultimately advancing Canada's position as a global leader in research and innovation.

Suggestion 3: Open Scholarships to International Students

International graduate students, particularly in science and technology fields crucial for Canada's economic development, represent a significant talent pool. However, the current federal scholarship system does not consider them for awards, leading to missed opportunities to attract and identify the best international talent. Many of these students are compelled to opt for institutions in the US and Europe due to the lack of scholarship eligibility in Canada. By opening part of the scholarships to international students, Canada can tap into a global talent pool and benefit from the valuable contributions of these gifted individuals. Embracing international talent will enrich the research ecosystem, encourage cross-cultural collaborations, and enhance Canada's standing as a hub for cutting-edge research and innovation.

Conclusion:

Enhancing the value and accessibility of federal scholarships and fellowships for graduate students and post-doctoral researchers is vital to ensure Canada's position as a leader in research and innovation. By implementing the proposed suggestions, the Canadian Government can re-establish the branding of excellence associated with these awards, promote diversity and inclusivity, and attract and retain top talent domestically and internationally. Investing in the future of graduate and post-doctoral researchers is an investment in the future prosperity and growth of Canada's research and innovation landscape.

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As a [next-generation university](#), we reimagine the future of higher education. Concordia's innovative approach to experiential learning and cross-functional research benefits our 51,500 students. Concordia is the [top-ranked university in North America under 50](#), located in vibrant Montreal on the traditional lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. We strive to be socially responsible and create a more equitable and sustainable world.

As a research intensive university, 20% of our students are graduate students and 30% overall are international students. Concordia University is the leading institution of the Canada First Research Excellence Fund award, Electrifying society, towards decarbonized communities, and received 123 millions \$ from the federal government in 2023 to support the initiative.