

To: Western University Board of Governors

President Alan Shepard

Provost Florentine Strzelczyk

cc: PSAC 610

We the undersigned write in support of Western University's Graduate Teaching Assistants. We urge the Employer to honour the demands of the PSAC 610 negotiating team on behalf of GTAs at Western, specifically, the following:

- **A real monetary increase in wages for all GTAs with no clawbacks or redistribution**  
GTA earnings need to be significantly increased to a living wage without any decrease in other guaranteed funds, such as the WGRS.
- **A housing stipend to ameliorate the high cost of housing in London, Ontario**  
Rents in London have increased 2.7% over last year; however, a year ago, the average rent in London, Ontario was reported at a **23% increase** over 2022.
- **Extended eligibility for Year X GTAs**  
Studies show that five years of guaranteed funding is essential as completing a PhD, regardless of discipline, takes an average of 5 years. This is the case for PhD students at [Western University](#) and across [Canada](#) and the [United States](#).  
Withdrawing reliable, guaranteed financial support in the fifth year of the doctorate intensifies graduate students' already challenging circumstances.
- **Guaranteed wages for proctors and markers that are equal to teaching assistant wages**  
Proctoring and marking are listed as part of routine GTA duties. Therefore, they should be equal to posted GTA wages.

Each of these demands would help establish the kind of foundation that we know, from experience, needs to be in place for GTAs to contribute effectively to the educational experience being promoted by Western. These demands, moreover, would prevent a future where GTA roles are mostly filled by privileged scholars whose access to resources and networks has enabled their success.

Like all workers, GTAs deserve real wage increases that meet the range of inflations connected to living. There is overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the glaring disparity between the cost of living in London and GTA earnings at Western.

Western's own [affordability calculator](#) shows that individual students who live alone and do not have personal transportation require a minimum of \$36,600 to cover the cost of tuition, ancillary fees, rent, food, utilities, and other necessities. The cost of living increases to over \$43,000 for students who are also caregivers.

An April 2023 study (Laframboise et al.) determined recommended stipends for Canadian universities based on the costs of housing, tuition, and other factors. Their recommended **minimum** for Western is \$35,848.39 for Master’s students and \$41,848.19 for PhD students (see figure below).

**Table 3. Recommended stipends for Canadian universities.**

University	Total tuition	Rent (one-bedroom) per month	Master's minimum stipend	PhD minimum stipend
University of Alberta	\$7086.54	\$1020.00	\$25 926.54	\$31 926.54
University of British Columbia	\$5777.02	\$2500.00	\$42 377.02	\$48 377.02
University of Calgary	\$7895.83	\$1610.00	\$33 815.83	\$39 815.83
Dalhousie University	\$11 060.24	\$1800.00	\$39 260.24	\$45 260.24
Université Laval	\$3187.44	\$1100.00	\$22 987.44	\$28 987.44
University of Manitoba	\$5011.86	\$1090.00	\$24 691.86	\$30 691.86
McGill University	\$6389.50	\$1500.00	\$30 989.50	\$36 989.50
McMaster University	\$8389.02	\$1640.00	\$34 669.02	\$40 669.02
Université de Montréal	\$5207.91	\$1500.00	\$29 807.91	\$35 807.91
University of Ottawa	\$7850.76	\$1720.00	\$35 090.76	\$41 090.76
Queen's University	\$9110.10	\$1700.00	\$36 110.10	\$42 110.10
University of Saskatchewan	\$5873.97	\$1020.00	\$24 713.97	\$30 713.97
University of Toronto	\$7997.28	\$2300.00	\$42 197.28	\$48 197.28
University of Waterloo	\$8414.33	\$1800.00	\$36 614.33	\$42 614.33
University of Western Ontario	\$9088.19	\$1680.00	\$35 848.19	\$41 848.19

Note: Recommended values for minimum master's and PhD stipends at 15 Canadian universities, based on tuition fees, average rent prices for a one-bedroom apartment in corresponding cities, plus an additional \$550 per month for expenses and additional \$500 for PhD students per month. Additional details on calculations, sources, etc. can be found in Supplementary Table 3.

Western’s guaranteed funding package for PhD students is an impractical \$23,360—far below the minimum recommended by that study. For many faculties and departments, the primary source of funding for graduate students is a GTA position. A significant increase in wages is required to *even approach* the minimum earnings required to meet the costs of living in London, Ontario.

Graduate student teaching assistants at Western are fundamental to nearly all aspects of the University’s strategic directions. GTAs are instrumental to enacting the University’s teaching mission given their roles as classroom instructors, partners in community-engaged teaching and learning initiatives, instructional and curriculum designers, graders and assessors, proctors, guest lecturers, trouble-shooters, and, more generally, people who provide important supports and pathways for the success of Western’s undergraduate students.

As we all know and experience in our own roles at the University, the kind of work TAs are now doing at Western has increased, requiring graduate students to account for and contend with the myriad changes affecting teaching and learning in recent years.

There is more pressure and less capacity, exacerbated by rising costs of living: food is more expensive, rents have sky-rocketed in London, transportation costs have increased, and technology and communication costs have risen. It simply costs far more to be an adult living in London and attending Western, whether independently or with a family.

The University’s new initiative, “Western in the World,” has developed a plan “to strengthen our internationalization efforts for greater impact, in pursuit of a more sustainable, just, and inclusive society.” In that document, Western’s *first value* purports that “Our words and actions are consistent, fostering trust and accountability.” The lived reality which too many Western graduate students are facing after four years does not correspond at all with this first value and public declaration.

What is more, many of our graduate students are conducting award-winning, internationally recognized research. Because of insufficient funding, many students are achieving success at the expense of their physical and mental health and financial stability. As faculty we are hearing countless stories of students taking on second and third jobs, commuting to campus from housing located an hour's bus ride away, and taking out exorbitant student loans. These factors impede graduate students' ability to participate fully in the research communities across campus and directly prevent them from completing their degrees on time. For Western's strategic aims toward becoming a more global university, it must support its graduate students, who are making essential contributions to the research culture at Western and beyond.

At the same time, we too frequently lose opportunities to recruit highly qualified graduate students because our funding packages fall short of what other universities in Canada can guarantee.

Truncated financial support has other costs too: increased stress and anxiety for graduate students, failure to retain graduate students who were successfully recruited in competitive application processes, and ruptures to future-oriented innovation and knowledge creation and mobilisation. By not fully committing to supporting GTAs at Western, we are upsetting the ecology of the institution and, at the same time, risking alienating brilliant new scholars whose research and training at Western stand to make important and lasting contributions to the world.

Low GTA wages directly impact graduate student time to completion, graduate student research impact, and graduate student engagement in Western's research community, as well as regional, national, and international research environments.

We urge the Employer to signal their proactive support for graduate students at this University by swiftly meeting this more-than-reasonable set of bargaining demands.

## REFERENCES

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