

Media Release

National survey investigates financial struggle amongst Canadian graduate students

OTTAWA – The Ottawa Science Policy Network (OSPN), a student-run science policy group, has released its recent National Graduate Student Finances Survey report. Based on over 1,300 responses between December 2021 – April 2022, the report highlights the financial challenges faced by many master's and PhD students across Canada.

“Graduate students are vital to the creation of research and innovation in Canada. However, there are significant financial barriers that are discouraging graduate students from doing their studies in Canada,” says Sarah Laframboise, President of OSPN and current PhD student in Biochemistry at the University of Ottawa. “We have listened to countless stories of financial struggle, brain drain, and crippling debt.”

This survey found that:

- **Financial Struggle:** 86% of graduate students in Canada are currently experiencing stress and anxiety about their finances. Additionally, 31% have considered leaving their studies, solely due to financial concerns.
- **Impact of Awards:** Only 14% of Master's respondents and 28% of Doctoral respondents receive a federal or provincial award. Award holders are 2x less likely to be struggling with finances, and 2x more likely to be comfortable financially.
- **All or Nothing:** We identified that graduate students belong to one of two very polarizing groups when it comes to their finances. For example, students who received tuition waivers were more likely to also have a federal or provincial award, while those who paid their tuition in full, were less likely to have an award. This leads to a polarizing effect where students either struggle significantly, or live more comfortably, with fewer students falling in between.

“Our survey findings show that many students struggle financially, impacting their studies,” says Anh-Thu Dang, an OSPN member, and current PhD student at the University of Ottawa. “Their contributions are important to our research programs and merit stipends and scholarships that match living wages.”

OSPN has been involved in the creation of the Support Our Science movement, as they have continued to advocate for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars' finances. This survey aims to provide more context and data to back up the claims of financial struggles amongst graduate students in Canada. Given this pressing need, OSPN members echo the recommendations from Support Our Science, and are calling on the federal government, specifically the federal granting agencies CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC, to focus on increasing the quantity of available scholarships for master's and PhD students by 50%, as well as increasing the value of these awards to a minimum of \$25,000 for master's students and \$35,000 for PhD students.



Ottawa Science Policy Network

<https://www.ottawasciencepolicynetwork.ca/>

The report and its associated materials are available at: <https://www.ottawasciencepolicynetwork.ca/graduate-finance-report>. For more information contact ottawasciencepolicynetwork@gmail.com

The Ottawa Science Policy Network is a student-run science policy group based at the University of Ottawa. The team is dedicated to promoting diverse student voices in science policy discussions at both the government and university level.