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## 1. Introduction

As one of Canada's largest research-intensive universities, Western is committed to graduate education. Western also recognizes that students who choose to undertake full-time graduate studies are choosing to delay their entry into the full-time workforce. To help off-set the financial burden associated with full-time graduate study, Western provides funding support packages for eligible and qualified Research (Category I<sup>1</sup>) Masters and PhD students. In fact, in 2014-15, Western distributed a total of \$90.9M in graduate student support from all sources. While this support is not intended to replace potential full-time employment earnings, it does achieve its goal of reducing the cost of investment in full-time study and mitigating financial barriers for students who otherwise may be unable to pursue full-time studies.

“Graduate student support” is defined and discussed in this report as one component of the University's total cost of providing graduate education. Other costs include the deployment of faculty, staff, and physical resources to graduate programs. Western provides graduate student support from various internal and external sources, all of which are described later in this report. The top four sources are Western Graduate Research Scholarships (WGRS), Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs), support from supervisors' research grants, and external scholarships received by students. Combined, these four sources contribute 85% of support dollars that flow to Western's students. All resources are combined in a strategic manner to optimize graduate student support whereby individual students with funding packages of equal value may have their packages constructed from a different combination of sources.

It is important to note that key resource allocation decisions related to graduate student support at Western are generally made at the Faculty level. In some Faculties, decision making is further decentralized to the program level. Each Faculty or program makes its own decisions on how to assemble graduate student support packages in a manner that best enables them to attract, retain, and support top students. Therefore, graduate student support packages may be assembled differently from Faculty-to-Faculty or program-to-program, with available resources deployed in different proportions. In fact, support packages may vary from student-to-student, even within the same program, reflecting student-specific eligibility for access to different funding sources. Funding packages will be described in greater detail later in this report.

Because graduate student support is achieved at Western through decentralized decisions involving multiple internal and external resources, there is a complex array of strategies for assembling individual packages. It is evident that there are substantial differences across campus in the allocation models used and the extent to which funding decisions are documented, communicated, and understood. This underscores the importance of this sub-committee's work. This report aims to build a common understanding of the key issues underlying graduate student support while offering recommendations to improve documentation and communication.

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<sup>1</sup> Western has a parallel priority to provide high quality professional (Category II) graduate programs. Students in professional programs are generally not eligible for graduate student support packages. Category II programs will be discussed in a later section of this document.

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## 2. Sub-Committee Mandate, Membership, and Process

The sub-committee was charged with the following Terms of Reference:

- a. To collect relevant data in order to document and understand the Faculty-specific strategies and approaches to funding of graduate students at Western
- b. To identify key issues in graduate student funding
- c. To identify and document best practices in graduate student funding
- d. To prepare and submit a detailed report on the above to the Provost's Task Force on University Budget Models

The sub-committee membership was multi-Faculty and included a variety of perspectives including graduate students, Associate Deans, and Department Chairs.

The sub-committee members were:

M. Karen Campbell	Special Advisor to the Provost
Pam Bishop	Associate Dean (Graduate Studies), Faculty of Education
Ashraf El Damatty	Chair, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Engineering
Matt Davison	Chair, Statistical and Actuarial Sciences, Faculty of Science
Helen Fielding	Chair, Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Tamara Hinan	President, SOGS and Graduate Student, Department of Political Science
Doug Jones	Vice-Dean (Basic Medical Sciences), Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry
Ruth Martin	Associate Dean (Graduate Programs), Faculty of Health Sciences
Margaret McGlynn	Assistant Dean (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies), Faculty of Social Science
Tom Sutherland	Graduate Student Senator and Graduate Student, Department of Chemistry

Available as resources to the committee were:

Linda Miller	Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Alan Weedon	Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy, and Faculty
Ruban Chelladurai	Associate Vice-President (Planning, Budgeting, and Information Technology)
Malcolm Ruddock	Executive Assistant to the President and Provost

Between September and December 2015, the committee met on 7 occasions for 1-2 hours on each occasion. The committee considered the following sources of information:

- Financial data pertaining to graduate program funding and graduate student support provided by the Office of Institutional Planning and Budgeting (IPB) and the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS)
- consultations with graduate students, graduate program Chairs/Directors, and Associate Deans to identify key issues, processes, and priorities (a list of consultation meetings is provided in Appendix A)
- letters submitted by faculty, staff, and students in response to calls for input by the Provost's Task Force and by this sub-committee

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### 3. Western's budgetary allocations to Faculties in support of graduate education

Resources are allocated to Faculty budgets to fund expenses related to graduate education. A more detailed description of the history of these allocations is presented in Appendix B. Briefly:

- Prior to 1996, Faculties received budget allocations for academic activities which included graduate education. The rationales underlying these historic allocations are not documented and the funding assumptions underlying historical Faculty base budgets are no longer known.
- Beginning in 2002, there were ongoing allocations, to the University and to Faculties, attributable to incremental enrolment growth in alignment with the provincial government's strategies for investing in universities.
- In two fiscal years, 2010-11 and 2014-15, funds were transferred to Faculty base-budgets to off-set the costs of providing programming, incremental faculty positions and student funding to support incremental graduate enrolments. The total amounts transferred, across the two years, was \$47.8 M. Included in the transfer in 2010-11 was \$22.8 M associated with the former Graduate Student Scholarship and Training Fund (GSSTF). The GSSTF amounts contained a historic disciplinary adjustment whereby specific Faculties received larger per-student amounts based on their lower use of, and lower access to, student support from external research grants.
- In addition to the above transfers to base budgets, there have been ongoing annual one-time transfers to the Faculties in association with incremental enrolment growth (graduate and undergraduate). The current revenue sharing mechanism, which reflects growth incremental to 2013-14 enrolment, is described in Appendix C.

The above base and one-time transfers have been provided to the Faculties based on enrolment growth. Faculties are then responsible for allocation of the resources to the Faculties' academic priorities through the annual planning and budget process. Through this mechanism, Faculties allocate the resources to graduate student support, as well as to hiring/retaining faculty and staff and acquiring/sustaining other resources necessary to support incremental graduate and undergraduate enrolments. Faculties have chosen to allocate different proportions of the above base and one-time transfers to graduate student support. This will be seen later in Section 5.

It should be noted that Western's incremental revenue sharing is based on the current provincial funding formula. Provincial operating grants to the University include a historical base funding envelope plus increments based on a variety of targeted funding programs including incremental undergraduate and graduate enrolment growth. As well, Western generates tuition revenue from domestic students which is regulated by government and international students which is deregulated. Any change to the provincial grant structure or provincial regulation of domestic tuition increases (for example, a tuition freeze) will influence revenues that support enrolment expansion.

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#### 4. Graduate student support at Western

The data on graduate student support presented below have been obtained from Western's student information systems and human resources information systems. Not accounted in the amounts described below are any amounts that do not get distributed to students through Western's financial systems (e.g., employment outside of Western, payment of tuition or stipend directly by an outside agency/government, OSAP, etc.).

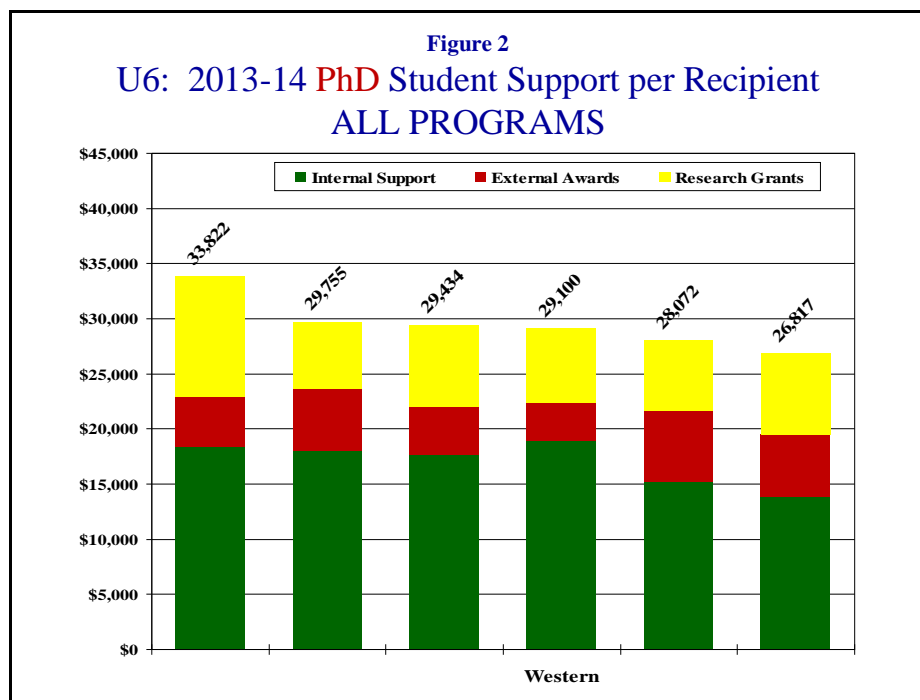
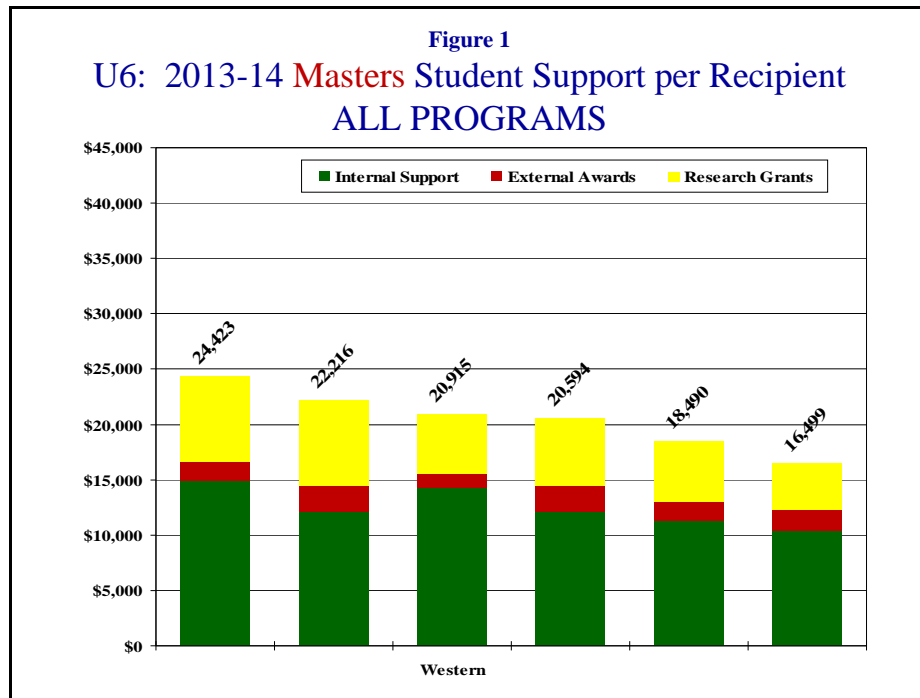
In 2014-15, Western delivered a total of \$90.9M of financial support to graduate students. Of this, approximately \$55M (61%) was from the University's operating budget, with the remainder from external sources such as supervisor research grants and student scholarships. The proportions of internal and external funding in graduate student support packages vary among disciplines.

Data from 2013-14 (on average funding per recipient) comparing Western to other U-6 institutions (the Ontario members of the Canada's U-15 research-intensive universities) indicate that:

- Western places high among U-6 institutions in terms of the proportion of internal (operating budget) funds directed to graduate student support;
- Western places lower among U-6 institutions in the proportion of support graduate students received from external scholarships.

In light of the second bullet point above, the sub-committee sought additional data in regards to factors influencing externally funded tri-council graduate student scholarships. At the Masters level, NSERC and SSHRC applications are adjudicated internally at Western and the University is limited with a quota of awards it can receive. At the doctoral level, Western is limited by a quota of applications it can submit, and the applications are reviewed externally by a committee that reports to the granting agency. Western's NSERC and SSHRC quotas for graduate student awards and applications are based on the volume of research grant activity (by Western faculty members) funded by these agencies. So, faculty grant success rates directly influence the number of awards Western graduate students can apply for and receive.

It is important to note that doctoral awards are portable. For example, a Western Masters student who secures (from an application through Western's quota) a scholarship for their PhD studies may accept the award at another Canadian institution and vice versa. Data provided to the sub-committee by SGPS on NSERC and SSHRC doctoral scholarships reveals evidence of transfers in both directions: scholarships transferred out of Western and scholarships transferred into Western. This is likely also true of CIHR scholarships, but we do not have direct data on this because the applications go directly to CIHR rather than through SGPS. Attracting and retaining scholarship award-holders is a priority and is discussed later in this report in the context of "top-up" funding provided for such students.



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## 5. Faculty-specific patterns of graduate student support in the last fiscal year (2014-15)

The sub-committee examined data on graduate student support distributed in 2014-15 stratified by the various sources from which it was derived. The \$90.9M of financial support distributed to graduate students at Western in 2014-15 was provided to the following student groups:

- \$77.2M to “fundable” Category 1 (Research) Masters students and PhD;
- \$5.9M to PhD and Category 1 Masters students past their fundability period (“year X” students)
- \$7.9M to Category 2 Masters students

### Sources of Graduate Student Support

The \$77.2M in financial support distributed to Western’s fundable<sup>2</sup> Category I Masters and PhD students in 2014-15 came from the following sources.

- 28.6% from Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS); this is provided by Faculties to qualified students
- 28.0% from Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) and other course support such as proctoring and grading
- 21.9% from the supervisor’s research grant (usually external but occasionally internal) are used to fund Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs), which is a mechanism to support a student’s work on his or her thesis research project, plus Research Assistantships (RAs) in which a faculty member’s research grants are used to employ a student to work on the faculty member’s research
- 16.9% from external scholarships from SSHRC, CIHR, NSERC and other external agencies
- 0.8% from donor awards, including endowed student support awards as well as OGS, Queen Elizabeth II and Trillium Awards; the latter are competitive provincial awards that are allocated to the University and adjudicated internally. Two thirds of the funding for these provincial awards comes from MTCU and a matching one third comes from donor funds.
- 0.8% from faculty salaries in roles such as teaching a course as a part-time faculty member
- 0.6% from Faculty Operating Awards, which are scholarships generated within the Faculty
- 0.4% from other Western employment, including co-op and work study employment
- 2.0% from other sources (e.g., MITACS, tri-council foreign study supplements, etc.)

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<sup>2</sup> The typical fundability period for Category I Masters students is up to 2 years of full-time registration. The typical period of fundability for full-time PhD students is four years for direct-entry students and five years for those who transfer from Masters to PhD studies.

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*Graduate Student Support by Source and by Faculty of Registration*

The various sources of the \$77.2M in financial support for fundable Category I graduate students are available to the Faculties in varying amounts and are used by the Faculties to construct financial support packages as shown in Figure 3.

The committee examined detailed Faculty-specific funding data<sup>3</sup> and made the following observations:

- i. The strategies for constructing student financial support packages from available resources differ from Faculty-to-Faculty.** Generally speaking, the data confirm that Faculties with predominantly SSHRC-funded disciplines deliver a larger fraction of student support from internal resources. Conversely, the data also confirm that Faculties and programs with NSERC-funded and CIHR-funded disciplines provide a larger fraction of support to students in the form of GRA, which are largely funded from supervisor grants. The sub-committee also reviewed the sources for financial support packages at the program level and observed that there is also variation from program-to-program within Faculties as well as variation from student-to-student within programs, and variation for individual students at different stages in their program.
- ii. There is variation around the average level of support.** The committee was told that where very low doctoral funding levels are reported in Western's financial information systems it is generally for students who have waived University-based support packages due to support that flows to them from external sources (e.g., sponsored international students may have resources delivered directly to them rather than through Western's financial systems). The very highest levels of student support are typically received by those who hold high-value external scholarships such as the Vanier Scholarship.

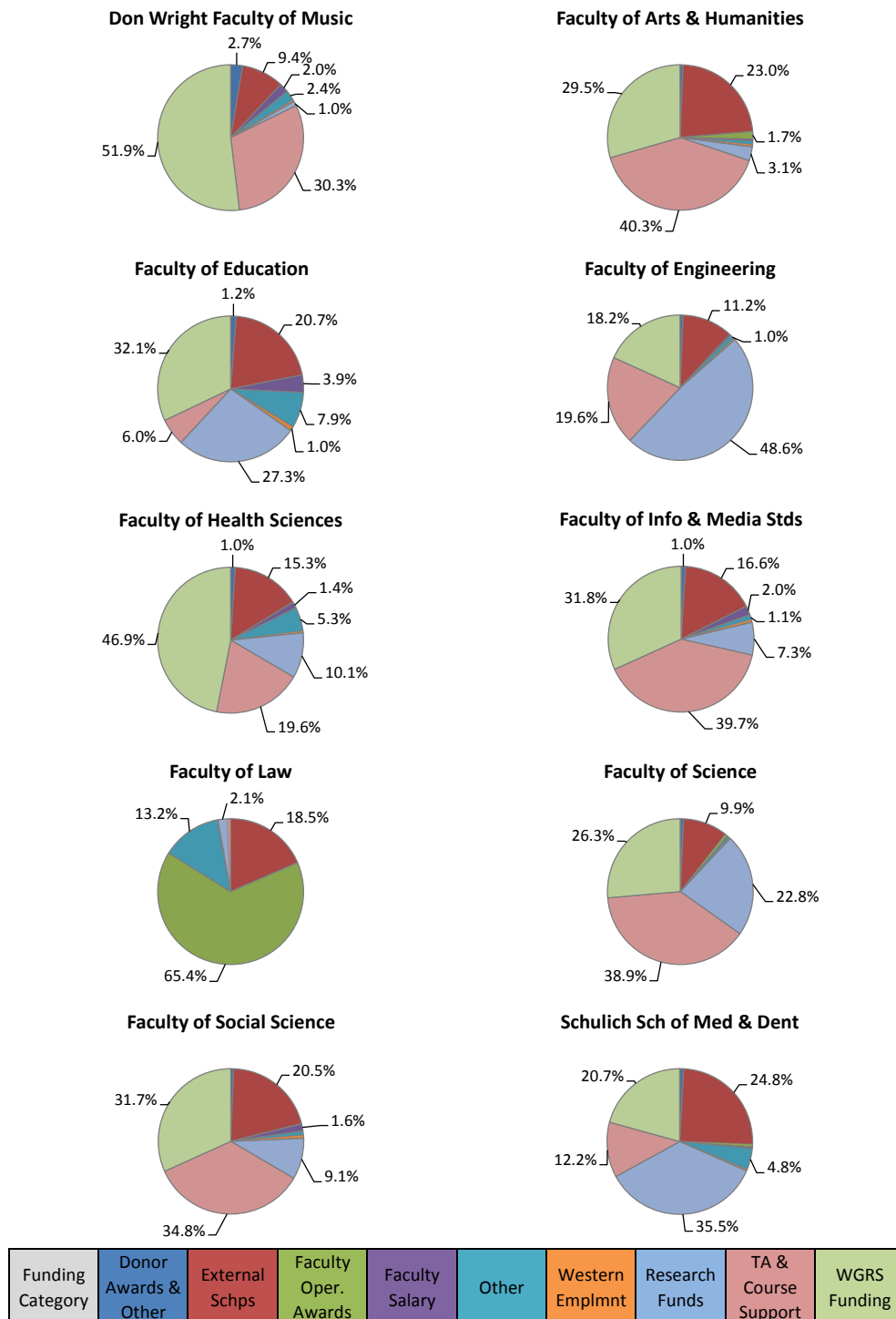
*Setting the Faculties' funding models*

The Associate Deans provided information on how resources flow to programs within their Faculties. This information was collected by SGPS and transmitted to the sub-committee. It is important to note that this information was provided in mixed formats, with different types of detail. In general, the information highlighted that Faculties that allocate greater fractions of internal resources to programs, were able to report exactly how support was allocated at the program level. These Faculties had detailed models that directed programs regarding allocation to each category of graduate student. In contrast, in Faculties with large supervisor research grant contributions to student support, Associate Deans were able to report what internal resources flowed to the programs, but did not direct allocation beyond that. This reinforced the sub-committee's observation that accountability for graduate student support allocations rests at various levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Greater detail on Faculty-specific support of all students is available to members of the University community at <https://www.ipb.uwo.ca/internal/Faculty-Specific-Graduate-Student-Support-Data.pdf>

**Figure 3**





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## 6. What the Committee heard regarding key issues and practices

Many of the issues heard from the community are related to lack of clarity and understanding of the program/Faculty-specific rationale for student support. As well, there were variations in how well programs communicated to individual students regarding the details of their own support package. The sub-committee also heard worries about the sustainability of some components of funding as well as varying opinions on the specific priorities that should drive allocation decisions. The latter can only lead to informed discussion and potential solutions in the presence of better documentation and communication of program/Faculty-level practices and policies for constructing student financial support packages from the various available sources..

### Varied levels of understanding, documenting and communicating graduate student support strategies

Student comments included the following:

- a. Not all students feel well-informed regarding how their program constructs graduate student support packages. Further, some do not understand the rationale behind their own funding package and why their package is not identical to other students in their program.
- b. Some students are concerned that their sources of support could change. This concern existed even if the total support dollars in the package remain constant. There is a perception of “losing” a component when it is reduced in favour of another funding source. (e.g., if receipt of new GTA support for a term leads to a lower amount received in WGRS funding, students perceive this as taking away something of which they have a right to a “fair share”).
- c. There are specific advantages attached to certain funding components. For example, the GTA component carries some extended health care benefits and the WGRS component can be credited directly to the students’ tuition account, thus reducing the out-of-pocket tuition expense.
- d. Some students indicated that they have difficulty finding a staff or faculty member able and willing to fully explain their support package and any changes.

Feedback from faculty suggests that:

- a. Not all faculty understand the rationale behind their program’s strategies for funding.
- b. Many faculty do not understand the funding strategies in programs other than their own and therefore make assumptions (sometimes incorrect) regarding funding strategies elsewhere. This leads to polarizing discussions.
- c. Supervisors and graduate programs all put priority on maximizing support to their graduate students and also view this as important for attracting and retaining strong students.

### Sustainability of student support strategies

Some faculty in disciplines that historically rely most heavily on internal sources of student support expressed worry about the sustainability of funding given it is dependent on enrolments.

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Some faculty in disciplines that rely heavily on GRAs from supervisor external research grants worry about the sustainability of graduate student funding in an environment of lower tri-council grant application success rates. As well, faculty research programs are impacted by the latter. Specifically, in NSERC-funded and CIHR-funded disciplines, graduate students are key contributors to future faculty research grant success (e.g. the student and the supervisor are co-authors on the publications arising from the student's thesis research), so there is a real risk of a downward spiral in both faculty research outputs and faculty capacity to take on future students. Some faculty also reported that uncertainty in the external funding climate influences the supervisor's willingness to undertake a multi-year financial commitment to a PhD student and some opt instead to recruit postdoctoral research trainees.

*"Top-up" funding to attract and retain students with external scholarships*

Students who do not hold external scholarships are provided with support packages comprised entirely of internal and external resources (i.e., mainly faculty research grants and contracts) available to the program. For students who do hold an external scholarship, the external scholarship contributes the major part of their support package while other external and internal resources are contributed to augment their package (i.e., "top-up" funding). Thus, students who hold external scholarships typically have much larger overall support packages than students who do not hold external scholarships, while requiring fewer of the other resources available to the program. It is generally understood and supported, by students and faculty, that students with and without external scholarships will have a differential call on program resources.

Top-up of students who receive external scholarships is seen as important for several reasons. It allows scholarship students to achieve larger support packages than delivered by their scholarships alone and therefore is a reward for the students' achievements. As well, it is important to ensure that we are successful in recruitment of high-achieving scholarship students when competing against similar programs at peer institutions. Many other universities offer top-up packages for external award holders. Beginning September 2016, Western will have a minimum top-up guarantee for PhD students holding external scholarships. The new Doctoral Excellence Research Award (DERA) provides a clear statement of institutional support for top-up of doctoral students holding external scholarships. The SGPS portion of the DERA is derived from 15% of incremental enrolment revenues received by the University (the remaining after the 85% flow to Faculties as described in Appendix C). Each graduate program or Faculty is responsible for finding \$5,000 of Faculty funds as their share of each student's DERA.

The sub-committee heard several issues around the top-up of scholarship winners, including:

- a. Top-up of external scholarship winners is the normal practice for many programs, but not all. Further, for those who do top-up scholarship winners, the value of the top-up varies and is not always documented.
- b. Some program leaders expressed worries about availability of resources to provide top-up funding, particularly in Faculties where smaller fractions of Faculty funds resulting from incremental enrolments flow to the programs for graduate student support. These same individuals expressed worries regarding availability to the program of funds to assemble

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the “program share” of the DERA. The sub-committee noted that this share of the DERA is comparable to the amounts many programs already top-up scholarship winners so that the current top-up could be used to provide the program share of the DERA.

- c. Students who did not hold an external scholarship at admission but who later received an external scholarship were sometimes not aware in advance of which components (WGRS, GTA, GRA, other) of their pre-scholarship support package would be retained as top-up and which components would be freed for program use to support other students and to support program expansion. This can lead to student disappointment if the model for program top-up is not clearly communicated in advance.

### Student travel

Identifying strategies to support student travel has particular relevance to SSHRC-funded disciplines. Although this is not formally considered part of graduate student support packages, the topic was raised in several community consultations. Student travel to attend conferences or to gather data relevant to thesis research is important to student development. Supervisor research grants are able to support student travel in NSERC-funded and CIHR-funded disciplines because a student's research activities and outputs contribute to their supervisor's research program. In disciplines where this is not the case, some Faculties have earmarked small amounts of funding in support of student travel. However, several groups expressed the need for more resources to support student travel. The sub-committee was told that \$1.6M in student travel claims was processed by Western's financial systems in 2014-15.

### The role of GTA funding in student support packages

Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) provide an important source of support for graduate students, particularly because they are also important opportunities for development of professional skills in teaching, communication, and leadership. In our community consultations and data gathering, we found that the majority of programs consider GTAs to be a component part of the student support package whereas a few programs consider the GTA to be “on top” of the student's support package. The sub-committee noted that, in many cases, programs would not be able to achieve the minimum support package without reliance on inclusion of GTA support as part of that package

### Summer Term support

In some disciplines, students receive support that is not balanced across academic terms. This can arise when students have full GTA assignments for which they are paid during the Fall and Winter terms and have GRA or WGRS components in their support package that are paid in equal installments over all three terms. This is a pattern that applies only in some programs. Students have expressed a preference for balanced funding across terms.

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### *International students*

Most programs identified the wish to recruit more international students to enrich their programs. In some programs, international students are essential to sustain enrolment. The University has made a significant commitment to the funding of international students. Firstly, 85% of all incremental tuition revenue from international students is returned to the Faculties through the revenue sharing mechanism. Secondly, despite provincial grant revenue not being received for international students, the University has made a commitment of additional funding (\$6,100 per Masters student and \$16,400 per PhD student, as described in Appendix C) up to a pre-defined “university-funded international enrolment number” (UFIEN) arrived at between the Dean and the Provost in the annual planning and budget process. There are no limits on the number of international graduate students a program can seek to admit, but the UFIEN determines the University’s additional funding commitment. Faculties may recruit, at their own expense, international students in excess of the UFIEN – recognizing that 85% of the tuition revenue for these students will flow to the Faculty budgets.

SGPS has identified several sources of sponsored international graduate students. For such students, sponsors typically cover the equivalent of domestic tuition plus a basic stipend to the student to defray living expenses. This leaves Faculties with the responsibility of funding only the difference between domestic and international tuition. Uptake of these opportunities is one way to enhance the number of international graduate students at Western.

All parties consulted acknowledged the importance of continuing to ensure adequate funding for the international students who are admitted into programs, recognizing that international students have fewer external scholarship sources from which to acquire funding.

### *Interdisciplinary programs*

The sub-committee received correspondence highlighting student support challenges arising in interdisciplinary programs, particularly when the programs are inter-Faculty. Supervisors within a single interdisciplinary program may have differential access to internal resources (WGRS, GTA) for graduate student support due to different funding strategies in their home Faculties. This can have challenging consequences, including instances where students may receive different overall support packages, even though they are registered in the same interdisciplinary program. In other instances, supervisors within the same interdisciplinary programs may need to draw on their research grant resources in differential amounts and therefore have different capacity to attract the best students. A related issue arises for supervisors who participate in more than one graduate program. Such supervisors have more than one option for recruiting graduate students and may make choices to accept students into the program with the funding strategy they view as most favourable. This may create unintended competition between programs for students and may lead to pressure on prospective students to enroll in a program that is not the best academic fit or fit with their career aspirations.

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Minimum value of PhD student support packages

The guaranteed minimum student support, from all sources, for PhD students within their fundability period is \$12,000 plus tuition. This guaranteed minimum has not changed for several years. Many faculty and students commented on this and suggested that it may be time to review Western's guaranteed minimum value of PhD student support.

Graduate students who are not typically funded

Category II (professional) Masters programs are designed to prepare graduate students for specific professional employment pathways. As well, Western has a new professional doctoral program (Ed.D.) with students who are typically working in teaching or education-related jobs external to the University. Category II Masters students are not typically provided with graduate student support packages. This decision is historic and was initiated based on the expectation that these students will be able to recoup education-related investment in subsequent employment. As well, many of these programs have a shorter duration. In community consultations, it was suggested that the assumptions underlying this historic decision may not apply uniformly to all Category II Masters students. The sub-committee noted that Faculties can, and some do, occasionally choose to fund Category II students where they feel it is reasonable to do so. However, extending support packages more broadly to this category of students would reduce resources available for graduate education in other areas, including support of Category I students.

"Year X" students are Category I Masters and PhD students who have exceeded their fundability period. It is recognized that the challenge of students exceeding their fundability period is not unique to Western and that, with few exceptions, other universities generally do not flow operating money to support packages for Year X students because such students do not draw provincial grant funding to the University. However, while many Year X students at Western are unfunded, there are examples of supervisors providing GRA support to Year X students and, in some disciplines, examples of Year X students hired to teach a course as a part-time faculty member. As well, Year X students are sometimes hired into GTA positions in areas where there is more demand/need for TAs than there are fundable students available. A detailed analysis by SGPS indicates that Year X students are diverse and have exceeded their fundability period for varying periods and for a variety of reasons. Further discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of this report, but the sub-committee notes the issues and urges continued evolution of strategies to reduce the number of Year X students as well as the time spent by individual students in Year X status.

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## 7. Summary and Recommendations

The delivery of graduate student support at Western involves the use of many funding sources with decentralized strategies for combining available resources into student support packages. Therefore, graduate student support packages may be assembled differently from Faculty-to-Faculty and from program-to-program. As well, support packages may vary from student-to-student, even within the same program, reflecting student-specific eligibility for different funding sources. Further, the sources of support within an individual student's package may vary in relative proportion at different stages in a student's program. The complex and decentralized nature of graduate student support is not unique to Western; distributed models are typical at other research-intensive universities. These strategies have generally been successful as demonstrated by the substantial amount of support delivered to graduate students.

These strategies have evolved from a series of historical decisions and adjustments that have accumulated into a large number of complex models that are frequently poorly understood and poorly communicated. This has led to some of the worries expressed by program leaders, faculty, and students. It also increases the difficulty of modifying strategies at the Faculty and institutional level in a cohesive and principle-based way if and when funding sources change. Many of the sub-committee's recommendations, therefore, focus on suggestions to improve the documentation and communication of current funding strategies.

The sub-committee also recommends that it is time to step back and review Western's support strategies and to identify any tactical changes needed to ensure the University will be able to continue to balance issues of fairness, competitiveness, and sustainability as we respond to changes in the external funding environment.

### Recommendations

1. **a. Develop clear documentation, at the program and Faculty levels, to explain how funding flows to students from all sources for all categories of students.**
- b. Clear and timely communication of these documented models should come from the Faculty/program leaders/administrators to students, faculty members, and SGPS.**

Specifically:

- **Documentation should articulate the level of funding for each category of graduate student and the sources that might contribute to this level of funding, as well as how the funding may change (i.e., top-ups, etc) if a student receives an external scholarship.** Some Faculties/programs use tabular formats that we would recommend. An example of the format used in one Faculty is given in Appendix D. In Faculties where the funding models vary across programs, we recommend that program-level descriptions should be collected and reviewed/reported by the appropriate Faculty Associate Dean.
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- **Documentation should be available publicly** such that all faculty, staff, and students associated with the program have access to this information. This will ensure that students are aware of how funding is assembled from multiple sources, how the balance of these sources can vary between students, and how their own funding entitlement may change as their individual circumstances change during their programs. This will also ensure clarity up-front as to the value of any top-up packages offered to scholarship recipients so that students know what they will receive if their scholarship applications are successful.
  - **The documented program-specific model prevailing at the time of an individual student's admission should be applied to that student for the duration of their fundability period.** It is recognized that availability of internal and external resources may change year-to-year and result in changes to the programs' funding models prospectively. The models should be cohort-specific so that each student knows what to expect during their individual program.
  - The documented **models should be reported to, and reviewed by, SGPS** who will ensure that Western's support principles are upheld while balancing the recognized need for discipline-specific variation to ensure competitiveness.

**2. a. Clearly document the individual *annual* funding plan for each student**

**b. Ensure that these are well-communicated to the students to whom they pertain.**

In particular:

- Programs should **maintain a detailed description of the annual funding plan for each individual student.** An example is given in Appendix E of a spreadsheet that is used to aggregate student-specific commitments in one Faculty for planning purposes. Such approaches will simplify tracking of funding and will provide a tool for checking the individual students' support against the cohort-specific support commitment.
- The **annual student support letter should be visible on the Student Centre<sup>4</sup>** in order to be available as an ongoing reference for the student and for those responsible for addressing student enquiries. The annual support letter is currently a requirement (template in Appendix F), but some students have reported that they either did not receive the letter from their programs or that they do not remember the contents of the letter.

**3. Create a structure to ensure new graduate program Chairs and graduate program Assistants are provided with the knowledge to undertake their roles effectively.** We also recommend **ongoing development and support** to ensure understanding of student support strategies, institutional requirements, and effective communication practices. There should be identified persons to whom students can turn in order to get clear answers to their funding questions. We note that SGPS offers summer workshops for graduate program Chairs and

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<sup>4</sup> The Student Centre" is the University's student information system that holds student-specific demographic, financial, and academic information.

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Assistants. Mandatory attendance at one of these workshops could partially address this recommendation.

4. Investigate the feasibility of **moving the delivery and tracking of non-employment (T4a) components of student support packages from Western's Human Resources information systems to Student Centre**. This would enable automatic payment of tuition accounts from any T4a funding source (as currently can be done with WGRS and external scholarships), thus reducing this financial out-of-pocket burden on the students. However, there may be some other operational considerations that need to be weighed in exploring this possibility.
5. Identify structures and avenues for **continued discussion on future evolution of our funding strategies to respond to fiscal changes and enrolment pressures within the system**. Such discussions should include a critical look at current graduate student support strategies and potential changes to position us to be nimble in the face of changes in the funding climate. Western-wide principles should guide discipline specific strategies and, conversely, discipline-specific realities should influence Western-wide policies.
6. Form an **implementation committee, reporting to the Vice-Provost (Graduate and Post-doctoral Studies) to ensure the implementation of these recommendations in the calendar year 2016**. We suggest that recommendations 1-3, at minimum, be implemented in time for the September 2016 graduate student admissions cycle. The implementation committee would advise on templates to be developed/used and would ensure that the implementation processes are feasible and sustainable.