

PSAC 901

Statement: “Respect our Research”

SEP. 20, 2023 – Research is not a business. Research is a fundamental component of maintaining a forward-looking and enlightened society. It is priceless: its contributions are timeless and the people engaged in it serve all of humanity. Your computers, your cellphones, the satellites that criss-cross the heavens, your health, all the reflective ideas in society, they all exist because of research. Research is a public good.

Across the world, universities were institutions which produced knowledge. They are now being transformed into educational service institutions driven by profit motives. This hurts everyone. The whole of civil society suffers when graduate education and research is treated like a business venture, or an undergraduate education becomes nothing more than a ticket to employment.

In spite of the skyrocketing cost of undergraduate education in the last forty years and the commensurate increase in income for the university, working conditions for graduate students, faculty or staff have not improved. Instead, there are less tenure track jobs than ever before, and less funding from the state for research.

A minimum wage worker in Ontario earns around \$30,000 per year. The Canadian government acknowledged that the minimum an individual needs to support themselves is nearly \$26000 per year. Furthermore, this figure was calculated in 2020, before the record-high inflation and rising rent costs of the past three years. The minimum guaranteed funding that Western offers for PhD students is \$17000 per year, and there is no guaranteed minimum for Masters' students.

Graduate students cannot live in poverty. As graduate students, we came to this university because we are prepared to produce knowledge. That is an end in itself. Research must be properly funded so that we can fully dedicate ourselves to research. When we are reduced to less than minimum wage labour we lack the time and the mental freedom to do meaningful research, let alone provide for our families. We survive by taking up second or third jobs to sustain ourselves taking up more time away from our research.

Graduate students are the frontline labourers of knowledge production. We are the ones who collect the data, conduct the interviews, crunch the numbers, and search the library. In our labs and elsewhere we do the ground-level work that helps faculty achieve their results.

It is in everyone's interest that graduate researchers make a living wage. The modern world is fighting a resurgence of barbarism and reactionary forces which seek to end democracy. We desperately need a new generation committed to the continued free existence of the arts and sciences. This can only be done if new researchers are given the space to thrive.

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We demand working conditions which respect our dignity as professional researchers. We need universities, legislatures, and a public that will support us, just as our work supports society. It is only when we, researchers, are supported that the university can fulfil its function. And we demand advocacy at the higher level as well: something must be done to get more funding for public higher education from the provincial and federal governments.

If our civil society is to survive, the arts and sciences must continue. Only universities can provide the space that will allow this to occur. We must not let universities be commercialized.

This is why we demand that Ontario RESPECT OUR RESEARCH!

PSAC 901 & PSAC 610

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