



# **Student Priorities for 2024/25 UBC Operating Budget**

**Office of the Vice President, Academic and University Affairs**

**October 2023**

**Prepared by:**

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Dear Provost Averill, Vice President Laezza, and Vice President Carry,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Alma Mater Society, representing all 61,000+ students on the UBC Vancouver campus to share our priorities for the 2024/25 UBC Operating Budget. In this submission, you will find asks that reflect a wide range of student priorities encompassing areas that we deem to be the most relevant and needing funding. You will see that we aimed to be as accurate as possible in our projections for the cost of as many of the proposed priorities and policies as possible. However, of course some figures have been approximated based on the available data. I recognize that the real figures may fluctuate as we move further in the budgeting process.

The areas we highlight in this submission are:

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Given the considerable impact that student fees have on UBC's operating budget, it is imperative that great understanding and care is taken into integrating student priorities. This submission, while comprising several important areas, is first and foremost concerned with the sustained issue of affordability on campus. Our ultimate objective is to ensure that no student's learning is inhibited by financial barriers. Thus, with each initiative that we underline and idea we propose, affordability remains our centerpiece. We are committed to partnering with the University to help alleviate the financial strains that students endure.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you for your robust engagement with the Alma Mater Society. I hope you are able to give our requests assiduous consideration. If you have any questions about any of the following priorities, please do not hesitate to reach out at [kamilkanji@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:kamilkanji@ams.ubc.ca).

Sincerely,



**Kamil Kanji**  
Vice President, Academic and University Affairs  
Alma Mater Society

## Graduate Student Assistance

### 1. Increase minimum funding levels and funding package year minimums for doctoral students

*Estimated cost: Increase 4-year minimum funding for doctoral students to 5-years at \$24,000 with ambitions of \$28,000.*

It is crucial to highlight a central tenet of supporting students through the budget cycle is making an active commitment towards supporting an increase in minimum funding levels for graduate students. Currently UBC has a 4-year minimum funding package for doctoral students at \$22,000 CAD, a number that has not changed since 2021 when there was an increase from \$18,000. This is important to note because these minimum funding levels are far below most other payment scales ranging from the minimum wage to the living wage to other UBC specific funding activities.

While these scales are not specifically a measure of minimum funding levels for graduate students, they act as a relative measure of income that reveals major discrepancies between where UBC stands as an institution in supporting graduate students and where we need to grow. This is concerning because according to the 2020 GSS Affordability Survey, each graduate student pays an average of \$36,000 a year on living expenses and \$41,000 on tuition.<sup>1</sup> Further, according to the 2023 AMS Academic Experience Survey, 73% of graduate students experience financial hardship related to the cost of housing, 43% report they may not be able to come back to UBC due to financial reasons and 38% report experiencing financial hardship relating to textbook and other learning material costs.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, minimum funding levels are not nearly high enough to support graduate students

Rate Description	Rate (CAD)	Annualized at 40h/week (CAD)
UBC Minimum Funding for Doctoral Students	N/A	22,000
2022 Minimum Wage	15.65	30,048
2023 Minimum Wage	16.75	32,160
2023 Living Wage	24.08	46,233.60
Current Average Work Learn Rate	24.71	47,443.20
Current Average Graduate TA Rate	34.47	66,182.40

Table 1. Relative Income Scales for Doctoral Minimum Funding

<sup>1</sup> GSS Affordability Survey, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

Graduate students not only face disproportionality between minimum funding levels and other payment scales but also often do not have the same access to financial support as undergraduate students do, whether that is from family or government loans. According to the 2021 Academic Experience Survey, 61% of graduate students expect an average debt at graduation of \$40,000.<sup>3</sup>

UBC is seen as a national leader in advancements in support of our graduate students. However, in relation to minimum funding for doctoral students we see that the University of Toronto for 2023-24 offers a minimum funding package at \$28,214 for domestic students and \$28,970 for international students.<sup>4</sup> McGill also offers a minimum 4 year funding package at \$27,215 for domestic doctoral students and \$27,725 for international students.<sup>5</sup> This reveals that we are falling significantly behind the national standard among major peer institutions when it comes to minimum funding levels. To promote greater recruitment and lessen attrition we must make tangible efforts to align with our peers.

We ask that the minimum funding levels for doctoral students be increased to at least \$24,000 with a goal of achieving a \$28,000 minimum in the future. To ensure this competitive advantage is maintained over time there ought to be a yearly indexing of this stipend in order to keep pace with growing economic pressures. It is important that our University gives this priority the urgent attention it deserves and to raise this minimum in order to compete with our peer institutions across the country.

The University of Toronto, University of Alberta and University of Calgary all provide 5 year funding minimums, attracting more holistic PhD candidates. Thus, we ask that the 4 year minimum funding at UBC be increased to a 5 year minimum. This would be a change that is more aligned with the latest average completion timelines of a PhD and one that puts us on par with other leading Canadian institutions.

As an institution we should be endeavouring to support our graduate students that make significant contributions to our ranking and reputation at every level of their education and this change will be effective in fulfilling the University's responsibility on that front. UBC academic units such as the Department of English Language and Literature indicate that "they expect students to complete [their PhDs] within 5 to 6 years".<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the University Affairs Journal suggests that the timeline of a PhD completion in Canada exceeds 5 years.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, in order for the University to set up graduate students for success throughout their time at UBC and achieve national parity to leading institutions in this respect, then the aforementioned changes are timely, relevant, and should be enacted in the coming year.

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<sup>3</sup>AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> "PhD Program Tuition & Funding," University of Toronto, 2023, <https://www.history.utoronto.ca/graduate/phd/tuition-funding>

<sup>5</sup> "Graduate Student Funding Policy," McGill, 2023,

<https://www.mcgill.ca/spgh/about-us/governance/graduate-student-funding-policy>

<sup>6</sup> "PHD Language," UBC, 2023, <https://english.ubc.ca/graduate/phd-program/>

<sup>7</sup> "PhD completion rates and times to completion in Canada," University Affairs Journal, 2013,

<https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/margin-notes/phd-completion-rates-and-times-to-completion-in-canada/>

## 2. Increase PhD Tuition Award allocations to be more expansive and comprehensive

*Estimated cost: Increase PhD Tuition Award to 100% tuition coverage through incremental increases.*

Another significant part of supporting doctoral students is evaluating UBC’s PhD Tuition Award. Currently the PhD Tuition Award (PAEIA or PAEIPA) covers under 25% of domestic students annual tuition and less for international students. We ask that a strategy be developed to take into account incremental increases of this award with the objective of offsetting tuition costs to the point at which this award can reach a place of 100% coverage. Increased investments into the President's Academic Excellence Initiative Fund will help support and sustain the incremental increases.

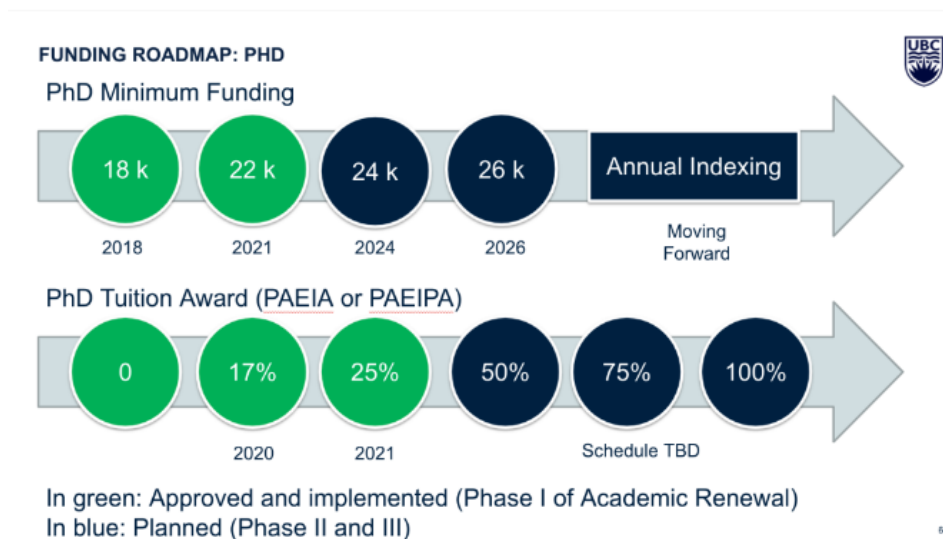


Figure 1: GSS Funding Roadmap for PhD Students

## 3. Introduce minimum funding packages for masters students across the university

*Estimated cost: Introduce 2-year \$20,000 minimum funding package for Masters students.*

In 2022, UBC had 7198 enrolled masters students. These are thousands of students who stay at UBC for a short amount of time to pursue higher levels of education. They contribute to our research outputs, campus experience, and the University’s tuition revenue. However, they do not receive nearly the same level of funding support as doctoral students. Although doctoral students are in pursuit of a more senior degree, that does not mean masters students should be left behind. This is why we ask that a 2-year minimum funding package of \$20,000 be introduced for masters students. This funding minimum ask reflects a relative average of the amounts offered by other institutions at the discipline-specific levels. The undermentioned Universities (see table below) in the U15 have discipline-specific funding packages for masters students but we hope to see UBC take this to the next level with a university-wide policy that provides a funding guarantee for masters students regardless of discipline.

Institution	Discipline-Specific Masters Program	Number of Years of Funding Guarantee	Funding Level (CAD)
University of Calgary <sup>8</sup>	Masters of Medicine	2.5 Years	21,000
University of Alberta <sup>9</sup>	Masters of Science	2 Years	27,704
University of Saskatchewan <sup>10</sup>	Masters of Science w/ Health Sciences Speciality	2 Years	18,000

Table 2. Discipline Specific Masters Minimum Funding Across Canada

Not only do Masters students comprise 65% of the graduate student population, graduate students also represent over 50% of the 16,000+ annual visits to the AMS Food Bank, are a majorly vulnerable population, and often have dependents to support while pursuing their education.<sup>11</sup> As mentioned earlier, both doctoral and masters students share these characteristics and so, it is important to support both populations with consistent and ambitious policies.

<sup>8</sup> “GSE Funding,” University of Calgary, <https://cumming.ucalgary.ca/gse/home/funding>

<sup>9</sup> “Funding,” University of Alberta, 2023,

<https://www.ualberta.ca/mathematical-and-statistical-sciences/graduate-studies/funding.html>

<sup>10</sup> “Scholarships and Awards,” University of Saskatchewan, 2023, <https://grad.usask.ca/funding/scholarships.php#top>

<sup>11</sup> “Food Bank Info Sheet,” AMS Food Bank, 2023.

## International Student Support

At UBC Vancouver, International Students make up 28.6% of the student body (over 19,000 students). On average, one year of tuition for an international undergraduate student costs more than the entire 4-year tuition of a domestic undergraduate student. International student tuition makes approximately 35% of the UBC Operating Budget, without which the academic and overall campus experience would undergo a remarkable decrease in quality. Despite this fact, there remain significant gaps in providing support to this vital sect of the student body.

Noting this and the added pressures international students face; having to adjust to an entirely new country, being thousands of kilometers away from family, paying incredibly high tuition rates and other expenses, and acclimating to a whole new culture, we ask the following be implemented in order to better support our international student population:

- 1. Additional funding into resources that establish mechanisms to assess need in foreign countries and expanding need-based aid for international students**

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

Presently, international students are only eligible for merit-based and hybrid awards at UBC. They are excluded from exclusively needs-based awards and various bursary programs that are available to domestic students (needless to say- they also do not have access to Canadian student loans). With respect to the hybrid awards that play a role in supporting international students, the number of students that receive such awards is limited and may not always accurately target the international students that need funding most. Therefore, awards that are strictly needs-based are required to alleviate the financial burden for international students who have significant challenges in the completion of their post-secondary education.

One of the biggest barriers in establishing more need-based funding for international students is a lack of mechanisms to evaluate need in foreign countries. As every country is different, it becomes difficult to find a consistent way to measure need. However, the first step in overcoming this barrier is to engage in real discussions around defining “need” in the international student context and engaging in far reaching consultation with the thousands of international students on campus to gain a better understanding of their needs. From there, a fully developed model is attainable that will understand need-assessment considering a variety of factors (general condition of the country of origin, different financial institutions, economic governmental regulations, etc.). The University can also at this stage, engage in conversations with peer institutions both inside and outside BC to better understand best practices in developing such a model. Need-based funding for international undergraduate students makes up only 10% of the total need-based funding available to students despite this group comprising almost a third of the undergraduate student population.

## 2. Expanding international awards for continuing international students

*Estimated cost: Increase International Community Achievement Award to \$10,000 and need-based award expansions.*

While supporting incoming international students should of course remain a priority for the institution to aid with recruitment and support the budget, it is equally if not more important that there be significant support for continuing international students. One of the only awards available to continuing international students is the International Community Achievement Award, which awards \$5,000 for students who have shown leadership in community service, international engagement, intercultural understanding, promotion of diversity or Intellectual, artistic, or athletic pursuits. It is important to note that this is a merit based award and with international students paying anywhere between \$42,000 and \$58,000 per annum, an amount of \$5,000 has minimal effects in relieving financial stresses. We ask that this award be expanded to \$10,000 per student to parity other Faculty and school-specific scholarships for continuing international students. Doubling this award will have a significant impact on international students' situations.

Supporting continuing international students through expansions to merit based awards is helpful but a glaring gap in UBC's international support is the lack of need-based awards for continuing international students. In 2022, approximately \$3.7 million has been allocated for Faculty and School-specific scholarships for continuing international students. Scholarships up to \$10,000 each are available for 2nd, 3rd and 4th-year students. In order to achieve these awards, students must demonstrate strong academic achievement, engagement in the faculty, and the potential to make a scholarly contribution within their chosen field of study. These awards are available for students at both campuses and are made on the recommendation of the Faculty/School where the student is registered.

No need-assessment of candidates is undertaken for these awards as they are merit based. It is important to note that despite faculty and schools allocating certain amounts of funding to continuing international students, 72% of the 16,000+ annual food bank visits are international students.<sup>12</sup> This exhibits a major oversight in the University's area of investment in supporting international students and points to a need for targeted need-based aid for continuing international students. It's worth noting that the federal requirement for incoming international students to demonstrate financial ability to attend University in Canada has a number of flaws. Even anecdotally, one can find out that several students even turn to relatives or family friends to borrow funds in order to meet the requirements outlined by the government before returning the funds to those they borrowed from. In even more instances, students find limited resources that help them accurately estimate the expenses and frankly, how expensive it is to attend University in Canada. While there could be numerous reasons that the University may not find itself having direct control over, the administration can certainly help some of these UBC students once they find themselves struggling to pay even basic expenses throughout their degree. It is imperative to introduce sizable needs-based awards for continuing international students. In addition to reiterating the aforementioned reasons, it is worth noting that this population on campus

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<sup>12</sup> "Food Bank Info Sheet," AMS Food Bank, 2023



is one that has felt overlooked and under prioritized by their University at various points of their degree. Introducing needs-based aid after the years of requests regarding the same will not only help international students complete their education, but will further contribute to strengthening trust between UBC and a large number of students.

### **3. Increase distributions in the Tuition Allocation Model for international students towards student financial aid**

***Estimated cost:** Increase international student TAM distributions towards Student Financial Aid from 7.5%-8%.*

To our understanding, a primary source for international student financial aid lies in the way tuition is allocated. In order to support expansions to need-based and merit-based funding for continuing international students, we extend the request that current distributions in the Tuition Allocation Model (TAM) be revisited to allocate a greater percentage of the revenue towards Student Financial Aid/ISI. The current distributions in the TAM towards SFA are at 7.5%, and after the several Budget Sessions, extensive research and discussions with administration over the years, we ask that the TAM be adjusted to have 8% allocated towards SFA. Recognizing that 74% of international students in the 2023-24 tuition engagement survey rank financial support in their top three categories deserving most attention, it would do students and the University well to have direct action in order to address this priority reflected in the budget model.

An increase to 8%, would add approximately an additional \$3 million to the pool of student financial aid for international students, which would expand capacity to support the introduction of need-based and addition of merit-based funding for continuing international students.

## Accessibility

The Centre for Accessibility currently employs 13 advisors, each of whom supervise anywhere between 380 and 400 cases. During the formal examination periods, the Centre reports invigilating approximately 22,000 exams, with up to 300 in a single day during peak times. With 5000 registered students and a steady 10% annual growth it's an important need for students that should be addressed through resourcing and adequate staff to support the Centre. Undermentioned are our propositions:

### 1. The recruitment of 7 additional Full-Time Advisors

*Estimated cost: Approximately \$397,000 to increase CFA Advisor team.*

If 7 new advisors are added, to a total of 20 full-time advisors, this will lower the workload of each advisor to 250-260 cases. Not only is this significantly more manageable, it also increases the consistency of the job and allows for better service for students. Students, clubs, and Undergraduate Societies have reported facing a number of significant issues related to the CFA caused by a lack of capacity in the advisor team to the AMS. We have heard consistent concerns around a lack of communication during time sensitive issues, a disconnect of timely communication between the CFA and professors, and a lack of initiative to engage thoughtfully with students who face serious developmental challenges and invisible disabilities like ADHD.

Peer institutions such as Kwantlen Polytechnic University pay their Accessibility Advisors on average \$29.52/hour, annualized to 40 hours a week this reveals a salary of \$56,668.80.<sup>13</sup> If this is the payscale we apply to funding for UBC accessibility advisors, we see that the total funding ask to increase the advisor team to 20 would be approximately \$397,000.

### 2. The further development of the Centre website

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate is not available (see below).*

A more robust website for the Centre for Accessibility is an excellent step forward in supporting the distribution of information related to the CFA that students struggle to adequately understand. There are a number of ways such a task could be accomplished such as through the onboarding of a Work Learn student, expanding in-house capacity to develop the site, or piggybacking onto current UBC servers through collaboration with UBC IT. Regardless of how this task is achieved, development of the CFA website will allow for a smoother registration and information system. According to the 2023 AES, of students who have disabilities and decided not to register for CFA, the most common reasons included not knowing how to register or unfamiliarity with what the Centre offers.<sup>14</sup> This could be easily resolved by improving the main source of information, the CFA website. The ambition would be

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<sup>13</sup> "Accessibility Advisor Job Posting," Kwantlen Polytechnic University, October 2023

<sup>14</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

that this project is pursued until a full website development, including better navigation and display of information is complete.

### **3. A new registration system that improves both the backend and user experience for registration**

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

According to the 2023 AES, a major reason that students with disabilities do not register with the Centre is that they find it too challenging or inconvenient to register.<sup>15</sup> Thus, a full review should be conducted to best understand where the challenges in registration lie and whether a different system would provide higher quality service to our student body. Recently, some schools on the East Coast including Queens University and University of Ottawa have recognized the difficulty of Clockwork and have developed their own systems that match the needs of their users.<sup>16</sup> The Centre should take similar steps to ensure that UBC services are as accessible as possible and the institution should support the monetary requirements necessary for such a project.

### **4. Structural change that follows the Universal Design for Learning framework**

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

We are very excited to see the new UDL Fellows Program at UBC. This is an exceptional program with 16 project teams of 32 total individuals and a current recruitment process ongoing for an additional 15 teams. This program should continue to be expanded through additional investments into the TLEF. We ask that a strategy for incremental increases to this program be investigated and a \$100,000 annual addition to the program be considered in order to support growth of at least 10 new teams annually.

As great as the UDL Fellows Program is, the entire campus should benefit from the opportunity. We have 12 Faculties, 61,000+ students, and over 100 departments- 32 members of the UBC community having the ability to participate should be considered merely a starting point. Which is why we ask that UBC invest in a widespread cross-Faculty strategic endeavour to identify opportunities and implement UDL frameworks into course development.

Faculties and departments when integrating UDL must be encouraged to consider the following:

- Enabling accessibility functions of existing software and technology within their units.
- Conducting training across the department, not just IT units, to ensure that broad support is available and minor technological issues don't hinder usage
- Developing mobile-friendly content
- Investing in multimedia repositories

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<sup>15</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023

<sup>16</sup> "Improving Academic Accessibility," The Queen's Gazette, Feb. 1 2022, <https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/improving-academic-accessibility>

- Frequently conducting checks for accessibility and quality of existing and new technological tools for seamless integration
- Ensure consistency across web pages and systems

Some of these components will require financial resourcing, however, we do believe that this program will enhance the academic experience of students by providing them with innovative and unique opportunities that they otherwise don't have access to within the traditional course components. We do note that there are challenges with incremental revenue in the central budget and would offer a suggestion that Faculties contribute to the UDL integration within their respective Faculties.

**5. A commitment to implementing permanent lecture capture technology in all learning spaces**

*Estimated cost: Necessary costs on data collection and installations in RTS.*

Consistently, students have expressed a keen desire for recorded, hybrid, and multi-access lectures. As technology develops, so too do study methods and we must point out that recorded lectures are used for much more than and apart from an alternative attendance option. In fact, students particularly find value in being able to rewatch lectures or parts of lectures for revision and understanding. Within our very own institution, Faculties (Medicine and Pharmacy to name a couple) have been setting prime examples of the possibilities to conduct multi-access teaching and learning for years while providing a strong academic experience for their students. Thus the notion that the widespread integration of recorded lectures comes at the cost of student learning and academic experience is inaccurate. We understand that there are certain apprehensions that need to be worked through and addressed, and not all of these apprehensions are regarding financial resources. However, it is crucial to address all of the barriers between students and the availability of recorded lectures as a learning tool.

Some of the concerns we have heard from faculty and potential solutions include:

<b>Intellectual Property</b>	Risk can be minimised via synchronously live-streaming the lecture, making recordings available for a limited number of hours, or making lecture recordings available exclusively upon request, etc.
<b>Student Privacy and Comfort</b>	Can be addressed by only recording the delivery of content (e.g. pausing the recording during discussions and engagement portions)
<b>Attendance and Engagement</b>	<p>The course can be designed to include attendance requirements that count towards assessments.</p> <p>We would go as far as to posit that if the primary cause of lower engagement is the addition of recordings/a lecture can be simply replaced by its recording (thus it offers no incentive for students to</p>

engage apart from a required attendance grade), then an evaluation of the course design could also be helpful.

**Pedagogical preferences**

While we appreciate the pedagogical preferences and reasons for not providing recorded lectures, we strongly believe that the effort to provide students with additional learning tools that are in-touch with current technology outweighs the cognitive costs of implementation

Building upon UBC's commendable investment of \$400k in 2021 and current coverage of approximately 70% of General Teaching Spaces (GTS) rooms, a focused budget allocation towards software licenses, personnel support and instructor training, and ongoing maintenance would be a natural next step.

To complement our financial request, we take this opportunity to emphasize the necessity of a cultural transformation. Despite equipment availability, there remains a gap in meaningful utilization. Faculty-wide workshops and training sessions are pivotal in bridging this divide. These initiatives, informed by gathering data on lecture capture usage patterns and faculty preferences, will raise awareness and provide mental comfort to any apprehensions. By addressing concerns and demystifying the process, we can foster faculty engagement and create a shared understanding of lecture capture's educational advantages.

To assess the impact of our initiatives, we also propose the establishment of clear metrics. By monitoring faculty participation, student feedback, impact on measurables such as attendance, participation, and viewing of recordings, and the integration of captured content into curricula, we can evaluate the effectiveness of the cultural shift and financial investments. Data-driven insights will inform future strategies, ensuring continuous improvement and optimal utilization of lecture capture technology.

To have an accurate picture of the impact of lecture-capture technology across campus, there is a need for concerted effort to ameliorate the management and collection of data on lecture capture technology in Restricted Teaching Spaces (RTS). RTS are faculty-controlled spaces yet a general student or instructor does not differentiate between GTS and RTS. In order to attain consistency in application of lecture capture technology, measure usage and student/faculty experience, it's an unskippable step to have agreements between the Faculties and the Central Units regarding RTS. Ideally, these agreements would facilitate making data available around progress on lecture capture technology outfitting in RTS, and eventually allow for even technologies across all teaching spaces regardless of their operating unit.

## Career Support Expansions

In the 2023 AES, less than half of the undergraduate students reported feeling prepared to enter the workplace after graduation and only 62% could identify careers they were interested in.<sup>17</sup> Both these numbers have seen an almost 10% decline since last year. Universities should absolutely prepare their students for success upon leaving and these statistics show a dramatic gap that must be filled. While the university does offer support through the UBC Career Centre, only 14% of students indicated that they have used these services and a worrying 49% have never even heard of CSIC (now known as the Career Centre).<sup>18</sup> This points to an urgent need to upgrade the reach and services of the Centre in a way that students will find useful. In order to achieve this, we propose:

### 1. Increasing alumni recruitment and mentorship through additional Full Time Employees (FTEs)

*Estimated cost: Approximately \$120,000 for two additional FTEs.*

The Employer and Alumni engagement team has recently grown from 1.5 to 5 FTEs. While this recent growth has demonstrated a commitment towards career development, there is still a major opportunity to invest into alumni relations and increase engagement through an alumni mentorship program. An investment in a centrally-operated but Faculty specific program presents opportunities for UBC to engage students at a personal level through truly addressing the nuances and niches that individual students in different degree programs have related to career trajectories. The management and supervision of this program could be supported by hiring 2 more program staff. This mentorship program would engage with undergraduate students throughout their degree and increase the visibility of the Career Centre. By engaging at the faculty level, the Centre has the opportunity to promote services specifically catered to the unique interests of each faculty. The exact amount of funding required to support this additional staff capacity is variable but based on estimates that align with peer institutions and current market salary comparisons, the following is the proposed breakdown:

Proposed Position Title	Estimated Cost (CAD)
Program Assistant, Alumni Engagement & Mentorship (x2)	60,000/year (salary + benefits)(x2)
<b>Total</b>	120,000/year for both staff

Table 3. Proposed Career Support FTEs

<sup>17</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Investing in focused career support specialists

*Estimated cost: Necessary costs to have 1 advisor minimum per Faculty and a new suite of international student career advisors.*

Currently, there are only 8 staff assigned to career advising for a variety of faculty and demographics. This creates a lack of specificity for students hoping for intimate career direction. Without a career support specialist that is able to cater to the needs of students in each faculty, it is difficult to provide students with sophisticated career support that is unique and designed for their academic background/experiences. Thus, we encourage hiring additional staff so that there is at least one specialist for each faculty. This is not entirely dissimilar to the hiring of embedded counsellors that have provided tremendous value. Students greatly benefit from specialized professionals who are present with the objective of supporting students in their faculty specifically- the benefits of that have been ample when it comes to mental health counselling and we are confident they will be equally if not more remarkable with respect to career counselling.

There is also an opportunity to hire specialists that focus on career support for international students. At the June 2023 meeting of the Board of Governors, the UBC Okanagan presented a new pilot project to support international student career growth. They indicated that three new roles would be hired to specifically aid international students in understanding career opportunities while pursuing their degrees and continued integration into the Canadian workforce post graduation. These roles and their responsibilities are as follows:

- Career Development International Student Specialist
  - Career preparation and training
  - Canadian work experience supports
  - Networking and professional development
- Industry Employer Engagement Specialist
  - Post graduation employer transition
  - Connections with employers and industry
  - Networking, employer education and job entry supports
- Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC) Career Advisor
  - Post-graduation Permanent Residency (PR) advising (including 3 years post-graduation)
  - PR pathways workshops, one to one consultations and education
  - Navigation of immigration policies

In the spirit of cross-campus vibrancy and consistent support for international students, we would like to see this pilot program introduced on the Vancouver campus as well. This suite of career programming and service specialists would address some of the most highly reported challenges international students face in relation to their career journeys in Canada, including: a lack of relevant Canadian work experience, uncertain employers, lack of Canadian personal and professional networks, limited job entry support, and lack of understanding on how to navigate legal barriers.

Despite the dissimilarities between their faculties, international students share common barriers with one another (from visa or permit issues to navigating the hours they are allowed to work to employer hesitations to hire international students and more). Such demographics would greatly benefit from a separate group of advisors who are fluent in these problems and can guide them through the appropriate options. It would also allow the Centre to properly serve beyond the 14% of students that already utilize their services.<sup>19</sup>

The aforementioned requests will provide a tremendous amount of targeted support that we are extremely confident will translate into results for students. We will also make every effort to raise awareness of the additions of specialized advisors and new pilot programs for international students through all available AMS channels.

### **3. Investigating alternative career support through technological platforms**

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

Post-covid, our world has increasingly turned to technology as a new tool in every facet of life, particularly education. In this context, it becomes unsustainable to rely on a strictly in-person method of career exploration. As preferences develop and education evolves, the university should aspire to use these new tools to enhance student services. Given the upcoming end of the LinkedIn Learning program in 2024, as well as the internal commitment of \$100,000 every year over 3 years towards investigating online platforms necessary to facilitate student success, the university has the opportunity and the resources to develop an extensive toolkit for students that extends beyond appointments at the Centre. A clear plan should be outlined in the budget to use this investment to explore platforms beyond LinkedIn Learning and invest in the ones that will benefit students the most. This expansion of resources will attract more students by meeting them where they are and realistically aligning with the technological world we live in.

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<sup>19</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.



## Teaching & Learning

### 1. Invest in sentiment analysis technology to provide greater clarity in the comments towards professors in the Student Experience of Instruction surveys

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

We propose that UBC invests in a cutting-edge Sentiment Analysis system, harnessing the power of technology to gain a comprehensive understanding of Student Experience of Instruction (SEI) survey responses. By integrating sophisticated algorithms and software into the analysis, the university and faculties can delve into the intricate tapestry of emotions expressed by students. This nuanced approach enables professors to navigate both positive and negative comments efficiently, gaining valuable insights into their teaching methods.

Integration of a sentiment analysis system will successfully prevent professors from having to expose themselves to the harsh, inappropriate and discourteous language that may appear in responses. Many such professors who have had a negative experience with SEI's have begun to call for their removal and impact when evaluating qualifications for tenure. However, these negative responses are not representative of every student and there is an immense importance in protecting the influence of students who have had instruction by these professors. Thus it is imperative to adopt a sentiment analysis system as it will allow faculty to sift through these responses in a streamlined methodological manner, creating a more valuable and constructive experience for everyone involved.

While numerous proficient Sentiment Analysis firms abound, we advocate for UBC to embark on the path of developing its own analysis program. This strategic decision ensures a tailor-made solution, finely tuned to UBC's academic landscape. The internal system not only addresses specific challenges but also grants the flexibility needed to adapt to evolving educational dynamics. Investing in advanced algorithms and software empowers UBC to transform the overwhelming volume of survey data into actionable insights, guiding educational enhancements effectively.

Considering the cost estimation of developing an internal Sentiment Analysis program, the initial investment proves justifiable given the substantial long-term advantages. While external firms provide adequate services, an internal system provides UBC with autonomy and adaptability. The ability to refine and customize the analysis according to evolving academic needs ensures a sustainable, finely calibrated solution. This strategic investment will not only underline UBC's commitment to innovation but also propel the university to the forefront of technological advancements, enhancing the educational experience for both educators and students alike. In embracing this transformative initiative, UBC secures a future where technology augments learning, fostering an environment of continual improvement and academic excellence.

## 2. Commit necessary financial and academic resources to the development of a UBC wide Exam Database

*Estimated cost: \$30,000-\$50,000 for initial investment with flexibility for greater contribution.*

Exams are something that cause a great deal of stress among students, they are incredibly anxiety inducing but serve as a pivotal assessment mechanism for contemporary post-secondary education. With this in mind, the University should aim to try and make this experience one for which students have all the tools to be well-prepared and achieve academic success. Thus, we are asking for the creation of a centralized exam database.

In 2013, the Senate endorsed the project of creating an exam database on the basis of several benefits including:

- supporting student learning and cultivating active lifelong learners,
- supporting self-directed learning,
- providing equal access to past exams,
- remedying the fact that some students have unfair advantage through financial means or their social networks,
- ensuring quality of exams,
- encouraging faculty to develop new exams rather than recycling old ones, and
- supporting student wellbeing and helping students understand assessment expectations in their courses.

Unfortunately, this project was abandoned due to the lack of resources uploaded to the database.

We aim to take a new approach to the establishment of the exam database. Noting that it has been endorsed by the Senate almost a decade ago, we plan on partnering with the Provost's Office and the Vice Presidents Students Office to ensure we can obtain an active commitment from Faculty to populate the database. The database is not meant to act as a replacement for practice questions provided in class by the instructor, rather it will reduce anxiety about potential formats and general exam expectations by demonstrating past iterations of exams, as well as prepare students to perform at a higher academic level. This is not meant to and will not serve as a study replacement. Additionally, for any courses where an exam may not be able to be uploaded, the database would contain a matrix that outlines other tools that can be utilized to ensure success in the course and it will be CWL login protected.

It is also important to note that out of the U15 institutions **UBC is only one of 3** (UBC, Dalhousie, & University of Manitoba) that does not have some form of centralized exam database either operated by the University, a third party like the Student Union, or jointly between the University and a third party.<sup>20</sup> This highlights a major gap in support for students. This is also a gap that does not require an exorbitant amount of resources and has a high “bang for buck,” if you will.

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<sup>20</sup> Cregton, Sean. “Proposal for a Central Exam Database at UBC,” Alma Mater Society, 2012.

We request an initial investment of \$30,000-\$50,000 for the actual development process of the online database. Information is limited on the exact costs that would go into building this repository but we are basing this estimate on another initiative that was taken on a few years back by several universities across the country to develop a new library database.<sup>21</sup> It is important that while this figure is an estimate, additional flexibility be maintained to expand the monetary commitment depending on further investigations into costs. A potential venue from which such an allocation could occur is the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund.

### **3. Invest in various pathways that support undergraduate research**

*Estimated cost: Increase Work Learn funding for international students to 25% of total Work Learn funding and \$300,000 for new Student Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Research Fund (SMURF).*

UBC's research experience is what makes us one of the most formidable institutions in the world. However, we have a strong tendency to favour graduate research opportunities and leave undergraduate students with minimal access. While there are some undergraduate research experiences that do exist, they are few and far between.

Currently, the institution offers Work Learn positions where students can gain a foundational understanding of practical research. They enter the workforce and gain skills that seek to equip and prepare them to partake in their own subsequent research projects. However, opportunities are highly competitive and limited. These opportunities become even more limited when talking about international undergraduate students. UBC for FY 2022/23 has spent \$3.24 million on Work Learn opportunities for domestic undergraduate students and \$1.07 million for international undergraduate students. We ask that this commitment be bolstered in the next year with an added focus on direct research opportunities for undergraduate students in all disciplines. We ask that instead of funding for international undergraduate students making up only 19% of work learn funding on the Vancouver campus, that it be increased to 25% with a strict focus on expanding access to research experience in order to further experiential learning opportunities.

UBC also offers a research award on behalf of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC). It offers undergraduate students with a research interest in Science or Engineering the ability to partner with a professor to conduct a research project of their choice. While this award is incredibly valuable to students in specific STEM faculties, it continues to reinforce research in disciplines that are already quite well supported with funding opportunities. If UBC truly wants to continue to make strides in research then it must find innovative ways to propel itself forward. What better way to do that than launching a new undergraduate research program that supports all undergraduate students interested in research indiscriminately of faculty or year-level.

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<sup>21</sup> "University to Bypass Expensive Database," CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/university-to-bypass-expensive-database-1.889415>

With this in mind, the AMS in collaboration with the Vice President Research and Innovations Office is working on the establishment of the Student Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Research Fund (SMURF), a groundbreaking initiative aimed at enhancing the landscape of undergraduate research. SMURF represents a vital response to the existing gaps in accessible and interdisciplinary research opportunities for UBC students. At its core, SMURF is designed to empower undergraduate students across all disciplines by providing them with the necessary support, both financially and intellectually, to engage in meaningful research endeavors.

The heart of SMURF lies in its innovative approach, introducing specialized guides known as Research Support Specialists (RSS). These specialists, often graduate students well-versed in the nuances of research, will play a pivotal role in mentoring undergraduates. They will assist students in honing their research ideas, facilitate connections with appropriate faculty mentors, and offer continuous guidance throughout the research process. The structured application process involves students submitting detailed proposals encompassing their research background, hypotheses, budget breakdown, and project timelines to an RSS. The RSS will provide feedback and then eventually recommend a proposal move forward in the process. These proposals will then undergo evaluation by an Adjudication Committee comprising representatives from AMS and UBC's research sector. We also hope to tie this program to the current undergraduate research landscape at UBC and hence aim to have all successful research projects displayed at UBC's Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Research Conference (MURC). Current discussions involve the piloting of this program across some Faculties who do not normally have the same access to research experiences like Arts and Commerce and others who can deepen and further current research trends like Applied Science.

We ask that a financial commitment of \$300,000 from UBC be made to aid in the initial development of SMURF. Approximately \$100,000 of this funding will be used to support salaries of the new Research Support Specialists with expertise in various disciplines who will be some of the primary folks responsible for facilitating this program. The remaining funds will be distributed in research awards up to \$10,000 to undergraduate students who when partnered with a Faculty or graduate student mentor proceed with a new and innovative research project.

This funding will be instrumental in realizing the vision of supporting dozens of diverse projects, each tailored to the unique ideas and passions of the students involved. SMURF aims to create an inclusive and supportive environment, fostering a culture of inquiry, collaboration, and innovation among UBC undergraduates. By requesting this investment, we advocate for the democratization of research opportunities, enabling every UBC student to explore their academic curiosity, contribute meaningfully to their fields, and emerge as the leaders and innovators of tomorrow. Through SMURF, UBC can cultivate a vibrant community of scholars, driving the university's research mission forward and ensuring a legacy of academic excellence.

#### **4. Commit to strategic financial expansions of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund**

*Estimated cost: Funding to increase to 20 large projects annually.*

The Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF), with an annual base funding of \$2.5 million, has been a catalyst for innovative educational initiatives across the campus. Since its inception, there has not been any change nor consideration of an increase to the fund. Thus, the AMS proposes incremental increases based on demand and need that would allow for flexibility within the fund while also ensuring that there is adequate room for growth in the projects taking place on campus.

We believe that an impactful yet achievable goal would be to **increase funding to allow for 20 large projects to be completed annually as opposed to the current amount which allows for just under 15 projects**. Allocating additional resources to the TLEF will not only enable the funding of a larger number of projects but also enhance the scale and quality of each initiative. We will work with the Provost's office on strategies to increase awareness of the opportunities that the TLEF provides to members of the community who may not have interacted with it before.

#### **5. Invest in stronger enhancements to OER Funding**

*Estimated cost: Recommitment of the OER Fund to \$1 million over 4 years (meaning \$750,000 for the next 3 years) and \$5,000 addition to the OER Impact Award for the next several years.*

The Open Education Resource (OER) Fund initially set at \$1 million over the last 4 years, marked a significant stride toward open education. While it is admirable that the current year has seen another \$250,000 commitment, we ask for this 4-year annual commitment to be renewed. This will allow for a greater amount of certainty in relation to the state of OER support in the future and allow for greater opportunities for long-term planning. This renewed commitment of \$750,000 over the next three years will provide comfort to stakeholders connected to OERs and increase capacity to expand initiatives.

In conjunction, the \$25,000 OER Impact Award being introduced this year, honoring professors for their OER utilization and academic excellence, marks an essential step forward, yet it represents just the starting point for a more comprehensive cultural shift in academia. With tonal shifts being made towards OER's, we would like to see UBC renew its commitment to the continued priority of barrier free education.

We advocate for the continuation of the original investment of \$250,000 annually for the next 4 years, accompanied by a year-after-year commitment to incremental increases. This financial reinforcement ensures the continuity of pivotal OER initiatives, fostering a culture of open education that transcends mere rhetoric. Simultaneously, we propose enhancing the OER Impact Award by adding an additional \$5,000, for the next several years as this award is being rolled out and grows in awareness. We believe

that this will further incentivise faculty on campus to dedicate time to creating these resources within their teachings.

We would like to highlight that these measures are not simply concerned with sustaining ongoing initiatives but are pivotal steps in championing open education. By reaffirming the OER Fund 4-year commitment and enhancing the OER Impact Award, we can amplify our efforts toward accessible and inclusive learning. These investments acknowledge the progress made, foster a culture of educational equity, and pave the way for a transformative educational paradigm where barriers dissolve, making learning truly accessible for all.

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

### 1. Invest in an increase to the number of Embedded Counselors available to students across the University

*Estimated cost: Necessary costs for a proportional number of advisors to size of Faculties.*

When it comes to health and wellness, many students do not have the financial freedom or insurance to afford their own health support. As a result, we see them turn to their university for help. In the 2023 AES, UBC Health Services and the UBC Wellness Centre were rated among both the most helpful and the most accessed services offered by UBC.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the AMS/GSS health benefit for counselling was rated as helpful by an overwhelming 93% of respondents who used the service. It goes without saying that mental health support is in high demand by students all over campus.<sup>23</sup> 41% of AES respondents indicated that they are currently struggling with their mental health. The addition of embedded counsellors has been extremely successful and is taking meaningful steps in addressing some of the mental health challenges. However, the University only offers a limited 13 faculty embedded counselors, which does not equate to one counselor per faculty since the Faculty of Forestry and the Faculty of Land and Food Systems share a single counselor.

Anecdotally, this results in long wait times for students in urgent situations. Therefore, at the very least, there should be a counselor available and equipped with specialized knowledge of every faculty. Even then, one counselor per faculty leads to a dramatic difference in availability and service across faculties. Reasonably, a single counsellor in a large faculty such as Arts cannot be expected to offer the same services as the counselor in Dentistry with vastly fewer students to serve. **Thus, we recommend hiring additional counselors in proportion to the student population of each faculty** so that students can receive the same quality of service regardless of which program they have chosen at UBC.

Once adequate distribution of these faculty counselors has been established, we hope the university can begin to explore the expansion of specialized counselors in order to best address the acute mental health issues that may arise within our international, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities on campus. We believe that having counselors who are equipped with specialized training to address inequities causing systemic academic barriers is an imperative that should be established once the imminent issue of faculty counselor representation has been addressed.

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<sup>22</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Affordability

One of the major threats to student wellbeing is the rising cost of living and the stress of being able to afford both the basic educational necessities and the quotidian expenses to support a lifestyle conducive to positive student experiences. A majority of surveyed students in the 2023 AES pointed to financial difficulties as **the most significant cause of poor mental health**.<sup>24</sup> Two primary drivers of this affordability crisis are the exorbitant costs of housing and food in Vancouver, both things that are a guaranteed basic need. While UBC cannot solve every affordability issue in the city, it does have a duty to its current students that it leaves no stone unturned in helping a student reach the completion of their degree.

In 2023, over half of surveyed students (57%) reported having experienced financial hardship related to housing costs and 8% reported having lacked a fixed, regular, nighttime residence which resulted in seeking alternate arrangements (living on the streets, couch surfing, or sleeping in an emergency shelter).<sup>25</sup> This inability to find proper housing is often linked to not only high housing costs, but also high tuition costs, high food costs, and inadequate access to enough financial aid. Additionally, similar to last year, almost 40% of students were worried about running out of food before they could afford to buy more groceries at some point last year.<sup>26</sup> It is incredibly unfortunate that a top 40 learning institution cannot guarantee that a strong majority of its students will have reliable access to food or housing throughout their academic journey. With these unrelenting levels of food insecurity, it is imperative that the university take appropriate and targeted measures that work to ensure no student's academic experience is hindered by their inability to purchase basics they need for survival. . In order to address these affordability gaps, we urge the Board and Administration to consider the following:

### 1. Increase the Emergency Housing Bursary and improve accessibility

*Estimated cost: 75% of emergency funding.*

In FY2022, UBC gave out \$431,000 in emergency funding for students struggling with unexpected financial crises. Approximately 50% of this was distributed for housing related costs . We ask that due to the pressing nature of the housing crisis, this allocation be increased to 75% of available emergency funding. Currently, information on the Emergency Housing Bursary is challenging to find and combined with information on general emergency funding. Compounding this lack of accessibility, the emergency bursary website does not outline what specific eligibility looks like, what you need to apply, or how much funding is available. This inadvertently complicates a process that is meant to offer immediate support during a stressful period for the student. Additionally, the data collection surrounding the disbursement should be more robust so that future initiatives have a more holistic understanding of what types of aid are most effective.

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<sup>24</sup> AMS Academic Experience Survey, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



## **2. Invest in additional short and long term housing support mechanisms**

*Estimated cost: Expansions to the Student Housing Supplement Grant to support students in all years and be available annually and \$1 million towards new off-campus rental housing bursary.*

Reiterating the fact that 57% of UBC students experience facing financial hardships related to housing, it is paramount that the institution be working actively to find mechanisms that help to alleviate this burden. One of the ways this can be done is through reshaping the UBC Student Housing Supplement Grant. Currently, the grant offers \$2,700 for students starting their first winter session at UBC in UBC-managed housing designated for first-year students.

Recently, the annual contribution back to student financial aid from surpluses made within Student Housing and Community Services have stabilized at around \$1.4-\$1.6 million. It was revealed in the September 2023 Board presentation that there is normally \$5-\$6 million in endowed monies in Student Financial Aid that goes unspent. By reallocating some of this SHCS surplus towards this Grant and working to change the criteria around some of the endowed funds in SFA that goes unspent, a larger number of students will be supported. We ask that this Grant be expanded to support students in all years and be made available annually to students, making it more than one-time funding. However, recognizing that there needs to be certain restrictions placed in order to not strain resources, we suggest that enrollment services help to financially plan with individuals who request this grant more than once and require some type of demonstration of financial need for these students.

Additionally, we ask that there be consideration made to the establishment of a new housing bursary that can provide continuous housing support to students by providing month to month financial assistance for a set amount of months as needed by students. It is important that this bursary be available to students irrespective of their year level and be available to those not in student housing. Ideally, this bursary would be more accessible than emergency funding as it would have less strict criteria, has a model that asks minimally invasive questions to grant a quick release of the funding to pay rent for a particular month when doing so might be difficult, and serve as a conscious step towards addressing the affordability crisis. We ask that \$1 million be allocated towards this bursary and it be run as a pilot program through the reallocation and readjustment of the criteria of some of the endowed funds that go unspent in Student Financial Aid. We know that approximately 47,402 students do not live in student housing which notably has below market rental rates. So for those who do not live in student housing or with family, they are normally paying exorbitant rental rates. Hence, in order to try and alleviate this cost burden and to try and make education more affordable, this bursary would go an immensely long way.

Neighbourhood	Unit Style	Average Monthly Rental Rate <sup>27</sup>
Downtown Vancouver	1 Bedroom	\$3,000
	2 Bedroom	\$4,650
West End	1 Bedroom	\$2,830
	2 Bedroom	\$4,200
Marpole	1 Bedroom	\$2,499
	2 Bedroom	\$3,329
Strathcona	1 Bedroom	\$2,550
	2 Bedroom	\$3,500

Table 4. Comparative Rental Rates in Vancouver for November 2023

### 3. Invest \$1.2 million specifically towards programmatic food security funding

*Estimated cost: \$1.2 million.*

The table below outlines the food security supports available to students at the UBC Vancouver campus. Experiences of food insecurity are never monolithic and therefore, solutions must also take on a variety of forms to address individualized needs. Cohesively, these services offer students autonomy and choice when receiving support that works for them. With the current allocated \$800,000 that must be divided between 6 services, each program is only able to meet bare minimum functionality. These services must receive adequate funding to feel confident that they can sufficiently cover the rising need of students.

An important note is that we ask in order for UBC Meal Share to retain a significant portion of funding it must go through seismic shifts. This means it must transform fundamentally how it operates. It has gone through a variety of iterations, initially it was first come first serve but transitioned to a lottery system where students were selected at random among applicants to receive the funding and access was limited to once per term. This system works antithetical to the idea of supporting those students most in need. We have seen consistently over the last few years that around 40% of students report facing some level of food insecurity and that students report food insecurity as one of their top three areas of interest for the university to address in tuition engagement surveys. We posit that these figures have not changed because not enough of a focus has been placed on need-based frameworks for food security initiatives. We ask that significant funding contributions only be made to Meal Share once systemic changes in the program are made to have a more needs-based application process that is still low barrier and does not disadvantage international students.

<sup>27</sup> “Vancouver BC Rent Prices,” Zumper, 2023, <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/vancouver-bc>

Program/Service	Activities	Estimated Cost for FY 23/24	Ask for FY 24/25
UBC Meal Share	Low barrier access to food relief funding through direct transfer to student cards or through grocery cards	\$199,000	\$450,000 contingent upon systematic improvements
Food Hub Market UBC-V	Provides at-cost foods and groceries to students on the Vancouver campus	\$60,000	\$60,000
AMS Food Bank	Extensive access to free food in person for students most in need	\$350,000	\$450,000
Acadia Food Hub	Community food initiative that supports primarily graduate students and dependants with access to free food and baby supplies	\$72,000	\$82,000
Sprouts	Food initiative that provides low cost food to students who access the service	\$59,000	\$59,000
GSS Food Plan Subsidy	New initiative to provide grocery and food outlet discounts to graduate students	N/A	\$50,000
Undergraduate Societies Food Initiatives Fund	New initiative to support undergraduate society run food initiatives that serve students on the ground	N/A	\$49,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$1,200,000</b>

Table 5. Food Security Initiatives at UBC

Several Undergraduate Societies have also recognized the state of food insecurity on campus and taken additional measures to combat it within their own communities. For example, the Arts Undergraduate Society recently set up their Food Hub which serves over 2400 students every cycle. This costs them approximately \$14,000 annually. Similarly, the Eatery from the Engineering Undergraduate Society provides below cost meals to students. This costs approximately \$19,000 annually. And of course, the Land and Food Systems Undergraduate Society's Agora cafe heavily subsidizes meals so that students can afford to eat on campus. In the past, this initiative has reflected funding requests of up to \$10,000.

These are but a few of the current Undergraduate Society food security initiatives on the go and reflect the dire situation students are facing across Faculties to find food that is affordable. Thus, we propose that \$49,000 of the \$1.2 million be allocated directly to constituency-run food initiatives, the allocation of which can be administered through the AMS. Through this program, the university will be able to leverage the intimate, on the ground, understanding that constituencies have within their community and provide support that is appropriate and realistic for students.

**4. Allocate \$1 million from Student Financial Aid towards direct “money in pocket” initiatives for individual students to purchase necessary food**

*Estimated cost: \$1 million.*

Direct access to financial aid offers students a dignified, anonymous option for receiving food support. Through this service, students would receive direct grants to buy food when and where they want, depending on their own individual lifestyle. This money would be distributed through Enrollment Services and similar to mainstream financial aid services, may be accessed through a short needs-based application. Following an initial pilot year, this funding should be sustained year over year with adjustments made as necessary based on demand. This would provide our most vulnerable students with a larger and more consistent stream of funding than what Meal Share is able to provide.

## Strategic Initiatives

As students, it is important that our money is being spent well. This means ensuring that the budget process, not only the budget itself, is both intentional and efficient. Only 14% of students agreed that UBC was transparent about how student tuition was being used and even fewer felt that it was being used well. Creating a budget process that optimizes the distribution of the funds available in a way that feels useful is crucial to a transparent system. At the AMS, there are a couple directions that we believe will ensure that UBC is being thoughtful and careful in planning the annual budget. These include:

### 1. Centering the Indigenous Strategic plan in budget planning

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

In the 2020 UBC Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP), UBC committed to aligning “UBC’s operating budget to provide meaningful and flexible allocations' ' towards goals that centred Indigenous learning and reconciliation. This must be reflected in the upcoming budget at several levels. First, in accordance with Goals 2 and 3, UBC should prioritize Indigenous led and focused research and teaching. This requires investments into Indigenous led research projects as well as financially supporting the advancement and “application of Indigenous ways of knowing” within UBC research.<sup>28</sup> This would include providing Indigenous programs and resources available for staff and students. In the ISP, this includes a database which identifies Indigenous supports as well as proper compensation and recognition for Indigenous faculty and staff who offer advising on Indigenous topics.

In regards to teaching and learning, the ISP outlines several areas that can be financially supported to improve Indigenous education. These include workshops for staff and faculty on creating inclusive spaces. The budget should also include adequate funding towards efforts to Indigenize curriculums across faculties. This may include hiring more Indigenous educators and acquiring Indigenous learning materials. While the budget absolutely must allocate monies to Indigenous advocacy, education, and research, it is equally important that the budget itself is produced in thoughtful collaboration with Indigenous peoples.

The budget decides the direction of the university and thus, must be created with Indigenous input at every level. This includes compensated Indigenous consultation and leadership throughout planning stages. Within the ISP, there are several crucial goals to be met especially within teaching and learning, and research which must be prioritized throughout the budget and the budget planning process. At the AMS, we remind the university of their commitments within the ISP and urge them to center Indigenous voices as they plan the budget.

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<sup>28</sup> “Indigenous Strategic Plan,” *University of British Columbia*, (2020): 29, [https://aboriginal-2018.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/06/UBC.ISP\\_StrategicPlan2020-SPREAD-Borderless-REDUCED.pdf](https://aboriginal-2018.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/06/UBC.ISP_StrategicPlan2020-SPREAD-Borderless-REDUCED.pdf)

## **2. A switch from incremental budgeting to zero-based budgeting**

*Estimated cost: Exact estimate not available (see below).*

Incremental budgeting has been the standard model for the UBC budget process over the last decade. However, given the recent strain on our process and national economic conditions, it is timely that the institution considers a different model that better suits the operational needs of the university.

The current endeavour to reimagine the budget process is the perfect opportunity to implement a shift away from incremental budgeting towards zero-based budgeting. Zero-based budgeting means that all costs will be reevaluated and justified instead of just new expenses on an annual basis. This will ensure that the budget is not being abused and significantly improves the transparency of the process. It also provides the opportunity to take a serious look at where current funding is being allocated and determine if it is being utilized to best support achieving the academic mission of the institution as well as ongoing student priorities to make education more affordable and accessible. Particularly, this allows UBC to eliminate staffing redundancies in administrative units that may be missed with incremental budgeting and reallocate more money towards programs and initiatives that are bettering the student experience.

## Conclusion

The AMS sincerely thanks the University for its open dialogue and willingness to earnestly consider student budgetary priorities. We took great care and attention to ensure that we were as accurate as possible in our creation of this submission, but please note our access to information on exact costs is limited. In addition to highlighting specific initiatives that we find to be most pertinent for this fiscal year, we hope for this document to allow further conversation and continued dialogue.

As years pass, the University's priorities and students alike are ever evolving. However, in this submission you will find that we have stayed committed and interconnected to the academic mission as well as UBC's strategic goals. We are keenly aware that the budgetary allocation process is a time for essential initiatives and programs to be funded in order to further improve upon the University. These projects are of great importance to the AMS as we are similarly concerned with establishing a better university, thus it is imperative that we highlight our collective action in achieving this aim. We fervently believe that a prioritization of student needs is a prioritization of the University's objectives.

We would like to commend and extend our gratitude to the university for its generosity in funding student facing initiatives during this most recent fiscal year. We recognize the importance of flexibility in providing one-time funding, however we are increasingly focused on creating long term solutions that will target systemic issues faced by students for years to come. We urge the university to consider its role in addressing such issues with planning that includes current solutions for the future.

Most importantly, we want to draw the University's attention to the continued issue of affordability and a recurring theme that consistently emerges - the accessibility of our university in terms of cost. It is my strongest belief that both the AMS and the University Leadership share the goal of addressing these concerns and understand that requires a comprehensive strategy that extends beyond mere discussions about tuition fees. We appreciate the efforts of the Student Affordability Task Force and the chance to advocate for students in those discussions. Moreover, we are hopeful that the formulation of an Affordability Plan will actively address some of the fundamental challenges faced by students.

Lastly, we want to express our gratitude once more for your openness to collaborate with us in enhancing the quality of students' lives at our university. Thank you for taking the time to read this compendious submission.

Please feel free to reach out in the case of any clarifications, feedback, questions, or further conversations.