

## Graduate Student Fees at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Graduate students at the Twin Cities campus play a central role in the University's teaching of undergraduates and production of cutting-edge research. Their own research, their professional engagement as graduate students (publishing in academic journals, presenting research at academic conferences, etc.), and their subsequent academic careers as MA and PhD graduates of Minnesota, form a major part of the University's national and international reputation.

However, each semester, graduate students are charged an exorbitant amount in student fees by the University. Many graduate students struggle to pay these fees, as they constitute a significant portion—in many cases, close to 10%—of the stipends graduate students earn as teachers and/or researchers.

Graduate student fees thus create undue financial hardship, effectively create unequal access to graduate study and graduate employment, and hurt the competitiveness and reputation of the University of Minnesota.

### An Issue of Undue Financial Hardship

In 2020-21, a first-year U.S. national graduate student in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) owes approximately \$960 in fees per semester, as well as a one-time \$150 academic records fee. Until the student reaches ABD status ("All But Dissertation," or the period of study in which a student has completed coursework and is solely focused on producing the dissertation), she or he must pay \$960 each semester.

Fees for international students are higher. A first-year international student in CLA owes approximately \$1150 in fees per semester, as well as a one-time \$150 academic records fee. Until the student reaches ABD status, she or he must pay \$1150 each semester. The additional fees charged to international students support the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) office.

For ABD students in CLA, the required fees are substantially less (since they are taking under six credits per semester, they aren't charged the Student Services Fee and Capital Enhancement Fees—see **Fees Breakdown** below) but still significant. Domestic ABD students pay approximately \$300 per semester, while international ABD students pay approximately \$500 per semester.

For a breakdown of the fees charged, see **Fees Breakdown** below.

The University takes an exacting approach in collecting fees: paying fees on a payment plan requires students to pay an additional \$20 fee, and late payments incur an additional \$40 fee.

Teaching positions for graduate students in CLA—the main, and often the sole, source of income for graduate students—pay a 9-month academic year salary of \$18,484. Student fees thus constitute between 3% and 10% of a graduate teacher’s gross salary for the semester. Non-ABD and international students are particularly hardest hit by fees.

Most graduate students at the doctoral level at the University do receive a tuition waiver as part of their employment as graduate students (or as part of their funding by fellowships). However, giving such waivers has long been a standard practice of graduate training in non-professional programs that are, by long custom, “tuition-free” for graduate students. The waivers do not alter the financial difficulties that student fees create, as these are charged *in addition to* tuition and often not subsidized by a student’s department.

### **An Issue of Labor Rights**

A November 8, 2018 post to the website of the Minnesota Higher Education Worker Center argues that fees are, in effect, a “tax-to-work” for graduate instructors, as their employment is conditional on their payment (<https://mnhigheredworkercenter.org/2018/11/08/grad-fees/>).

Graduate students at our peer institutions have also identified the high cost of graduate fees as a labor rights issue. At Indiana University, the Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition (IGWC) has protested Indiana’s high fees (they are comparable to Minnesota’s), arguing that “we should not have to pay to work” (<https://www.indianagradworkers.org/petition-page>). Consequently, the IGWC has called for a fee strike in spring 2021 to withhold payment of fees until the University adequately addresses the hardship that fees, inadequate stipends, and suboptimal working conditions create for graduate students (<https://www.indianagradworkers.org/justification>).

### **An Issue of Equity and Access**

In an April 20, 2017, thirty-six Directors of Graduate Studies from across the University expressed concern over the disparity in fees for international and U.S. national students. For international students, they note, this disparity effectively constitutes a “tax on their citizenship.”

According to the Council of Graduate Students’ April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Resolution on International Student Fees, “the fees burden required of international graduate students to provide visa related services is roughly double the second highest such burden among other Big Ten institutions” (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uN3aDygSx5FqcQ3vU32ebLIVdB0vHz0yuaaAkclb-ds/edit>).

Because of restrictions in their visas, international students are often unable to take supplementary, non-academic employment. The fees are thus even more of a hardship for them.

As student fees are assessed as flat rates, they disproportionately restrict access to graduate education and graduate teaching for students in economically underprivileged circumstances. In effect, they perpetuate an inequitable reality in which graduate education is more easily accessed by the socioeconomically advantaged.

### **An Issue of Institutional Prestige, Reputation, and Diversity**

Graduate students are central to the University's mission as a research and teaching institution. Graduate teachers teach their discipline's subject matter to undergraduates, and they participate in the academic work of the University, generating cutting-edge research and knowledge. They do this not only when employed as research assistants to faculty, but through their own doctoral research and professional engagement, including publications and conference presentations at the national and international level. Not only are Minnesota graduate students a key part of the institution's academic and professional visibility, a good deal of the University's reputation for academic excellence rests on the contributions its graduate-degree holders continue to make in their disciplines throughout their careers.

The high graduate student fees charged by Minnesota hurt the ability of graduate programs to attract competitive graduate students. As DGSes avow in the April 20, 2017 letter, "research by the Council of Graduate Students indicates that University of Minnesota fees are close to the highest among our peer institutions, which we have seen as having a material impact on our ability to attract the strongest candidates to our programs."

The high fees for international students, in particular, carry implications for the University's international reputation. To quote the April 20, 2017 letter: "it is precisely the presence of international graduate students that gives Minnesota its ability to claim its status as a major research institution. Likewise, a good deal of University of Minnesota research takes place in non-US locations and depends on the good faith contributions of non-US collaborators, community members, and research subjects, enabling our US faculty, graduate students, and the University itself to claim a global perspective. *Given these points, asking international students to pay an annual fee for matriculating at Minnesota—some of whom have even been collaborators with our faculty in their home countries—seems cynical at best and unethical at worst*" (emphasis added).

The current fee rates at Minnesota not only work against the University's ability to attract outstanding graduate students, they often form a barrier to access for international students and students from underrepresented backgrounds. As such, they potentially compromise the diversity and inclusiveness of the graduate community at the University.

## **Semester Fees Breakdown for Graduate Students at the Twin Cities Campus**

### ***For U.S. National Graduate Students***

Graduate students pay a fee assessed by their home college. For CLA, this is \$250 for students taking 6 or more credits, and \$125 for students taking under 6 credits. This fee amount and attendant credit threshold varies across colleges. For instance, students in the College of Biological Sciences pay \$300 (6 or more) or \$150 (under 6). Students in the College of Design pay \$350 (6 or more) or \$175 (under 6). Students in the College of Science and Engineering pay \$330 (6 or more) or \$165 (under 6). Most colleges assess fees of between \$185 and \$300 for 6-credit students. On the higher end, students in the College of Pharmacy pay a combined fee of \$670 (6 or more credits) or \$560 (under 6).

Graduate students are also charged the Student Services Fee if they are enrolled in 6 or more credits. This fee is \$454.24 per semester. It includes, among other services, fees for student media outlets like the *Minnesota Daily*, and campus services like the Recreation and Wellness Center and the Boynton Health Center.

Students pay a \$10.36 fee each semester to support the Council of Graduate Students, a student government organization for Twin Cities graduate students enrolled in M.A. or Ph.D. programs.

Graduate students not having alternative healthcare coverage are enrolled in the University-sponsored Student Health Benefit Plan, which carries a fee of \$139.32 per semester.

Graduate students who pay the Student Services fee are charged an additional Capital Enhancement fee of \$75, effectively paying for the infrastructural upkeep of their own working spaces. Graduate students are also charged \$6 a semester to support the University's debt servicing on TCF Bank Stadium. Finally, graduate students are charged a \$25 Transportation and Safety fee, which supports campus safety programs and campus transit.

All newly-matriculated graduate students are charged a one-time, \$150 Academic Records fee to fund the ordering and production of transcripts and other student records.

### ***For International Graduate Students***

In addition to all pertinent fees assessed to U.S. nationals, international students pay an International Student Support Services fee of \$175, which supports the International Student and Scholar Services office. They are also charged a \$14 International Student Engagement fee.

## **Fee Totals Per Semester**

U.S. National Pre-ABD (taking 6 or more credits) Student in CLA

CLA Collegiate fee: \$250 (higher or lower in other colleges)

Student Services fee: \$454.24

Council of Graduate Students Fee: \$10.36

Health Insurance fee: \$139.32

Capital Enhancement fee: \$75

Stadium fee: \$6

Transportation fee: \$25

**Total: \$959.92** (add \$150 one-time Academic Records fee for a total of **\$1109.92** in a student's first semester matriculated)

U.S. National ABD (taking under 6 credits) Student in CLA

CLA Collegiate fee: \$125 (higher or lower in other colleges)

Health Insurance fee: \$139.32

Council of Graduate Students fee: \$10.36

Stadium fee: \$6

Transportation fee: \$25

**Total: \$305.68**

International Pre-ABD (taking 6 or more credits) Student in CLA

All fees charged to U.S. national pre-ABD students: \$959.92

International Student Support Services Fee: \$175

International Student Engagement Fee: \$14

**Total: \$1148.92** (add \$150 one-time Academic Records fee for a total of **\$1298.92** in a student's first semester matriculated)

International ABD (taking under 6 credits) Student in CLA

All fees charged to U.S. national ABD students: \$305.68

International Student Support Services Fee: \$175

International Student Engagement Fee: \$14

**Total: \$494.68**