

A REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE



THE
2020
GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE SOCIETY
FUNDING AND
FINANCES
SURVEY

WRITTEN AND PRESENTED
BY THE 2019/2020
GGG EXECUTIVE TEAM



We are pleased to once again present the results of the Geography Graduate Society (GGS) Funding and Finances Survey. This is our second annual iteration of the survey and is one of the main responsibilities of the GGS Executive Team. Each member of the team contributed in their own ways, bringing skills and expertise to the survey. As noted in the introduction of last years' report, it was only with a dedicated team of people from diverse backgrounds, research specialties, and life experiences that we could make this survey and report happen.

This year's survey was first released on January 29, 2020. While originally slated to close on February 14, 2020, the survey's end date was extended to February 24, 2020. Providing our colleagues with regular reminders about the survey and the importance of data collection for future lobbying efforts was crucial in helping us achieve our final response rate.

As we begin to build the institutional memory necessary to earn the trust and support of our fellow graduate students, concerns over privacy and security have lessened. This does not mean that they have been completely alleviated, though, and future iterations of this survey will have to continue to find that delicate balance between security, transparency, and data collection.

There were, just as with last year, concerns from students who were worried about the reaction of their supervisors and faculty to their submissions to this survey. We continue to work on measures to protect participants and to reassure that no raw data

will be publicly released to encourage greater participation.

We again hope that this survey becomes a regular occurrence so that we can present longitudinal data to inform our supervisors, our colleagues, and our department about the changing financial situation we face as graduate students. This need is further highlighted by the current COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing the vulnerability that students face.

When last year's results were presented to faculty, one professor explicitly asked what amount of funding will support a graduate student living in Montreal to 'break even', making an argument that sufficient funding is an ethical decision. We agree with this professor's argument. As graduate students, we are all passionate about what we study and are unwilling to change course despite incurring debt and working long hours in both academic and unrelated professions to make ends meet. To this end, we hope to create transparency so that the department (as a whole) and/or supervisors (individually) may make ethical decisions for funding their graduate students at adequate levels. The knowledge that we create, should ultimately serve to benefit not only us, but those who follow in our footsteps.

Sincerely,

Chris Erl
2019-2020 GGS Co-President

Patrick Slack
2019-2020 GGS Co-President

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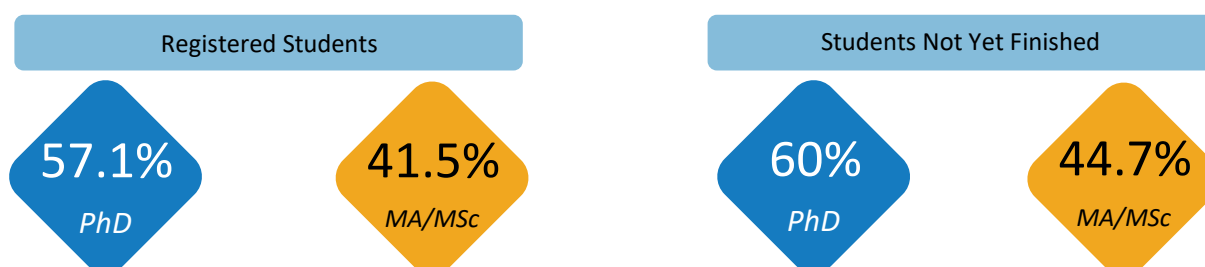
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Survey Presentation and Methodology

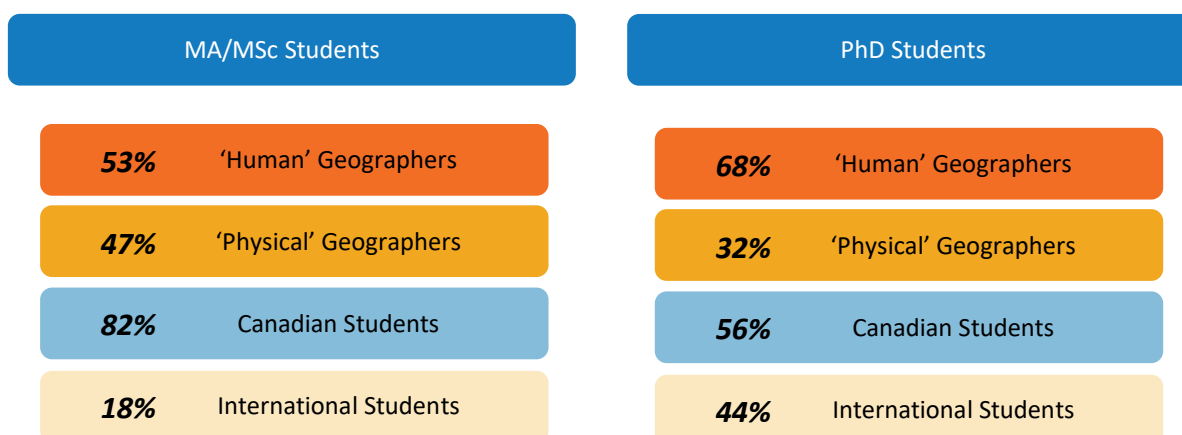
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registered graduate students responded to the survey. This was a modest increase of one response from 2019. This represents 50.6 percent of all registered graduate students (including those who have defended at the time of the survey) and 53.9 percent of graduate students who had not yet defended their dissertations/submitted their theses.

There was a notable increase in the number of PhD students who responded and a notable decrease in responses from MA/MSc students. Below are the proportion of respondents based on statuses:



In most cases, results will be presented **as percentages** of those respondents who answered each question and individual responses have been aggregated into **manageable ranges**. This is in an effort to protect and respect the anonymity of respondents and to provide a broad overview of the financial situation of graduate students. Below are the detailed percentages of international/domestic and 'physical'/'human' survey respondents by graduate degree:



1 - Overview

Similar to the 2018-2019 version of this survey, we sought to ascertain the funding and living expenses of graduate students in geography.

The survey was divided into some broad categories: **Funding and Finance** (including information about grants, loans, and assistance), **Fieldwork** (including information on conference spending), **Living Arrangements** (looking at essential expenses outside of school), and concluding with **Opinions and Perspectives**.

This year, we included more opinion questions, simplified some of our questions, and included questions on tuition. In this report, we assess the overall financial situation of graduate students in the department before breaking down expenses and income.

1.1 Academic Income

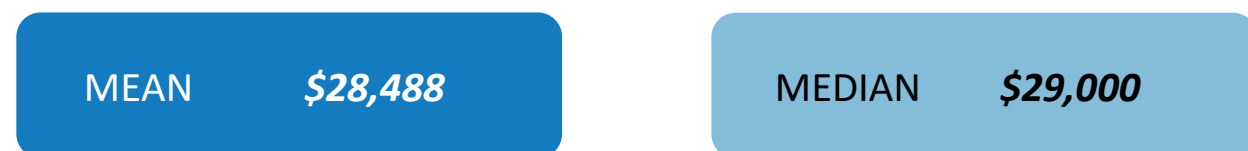
Participants were asked to provide information relating to their income from academic sources including:

- Supervisor(s) and/or other faculty members
- Academic employment, including as TAs, RAs, and invigilators
- Bursaries and scholarships

Based on responses, the mean and median academic income of MA/MSc students are:



The mean and median academic income of PhD students are:



For MA/MSc Students, 58 percent of respondents have a yearly income of less than \$20,000, the average total income (see Figure 1). In Québec, the yearly minimum income totals to \$27,248 before taxes (\$13.10/hour).¹ The highest average source of funding for MA/MSc students is from bursaries or scholarships, although the majority of this income is granted to Canadian students.

¹ <https://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/wages-pay-and-work/wages/index.html>

On the same note, the average income of Canadian MA/MSc students is \$21,694, while the average of international students is \$12,657 (see Figure 2). Additionally, almost half (49%) of the total funds allocated to MA/MSc students came from scholarships (see Figure 4).

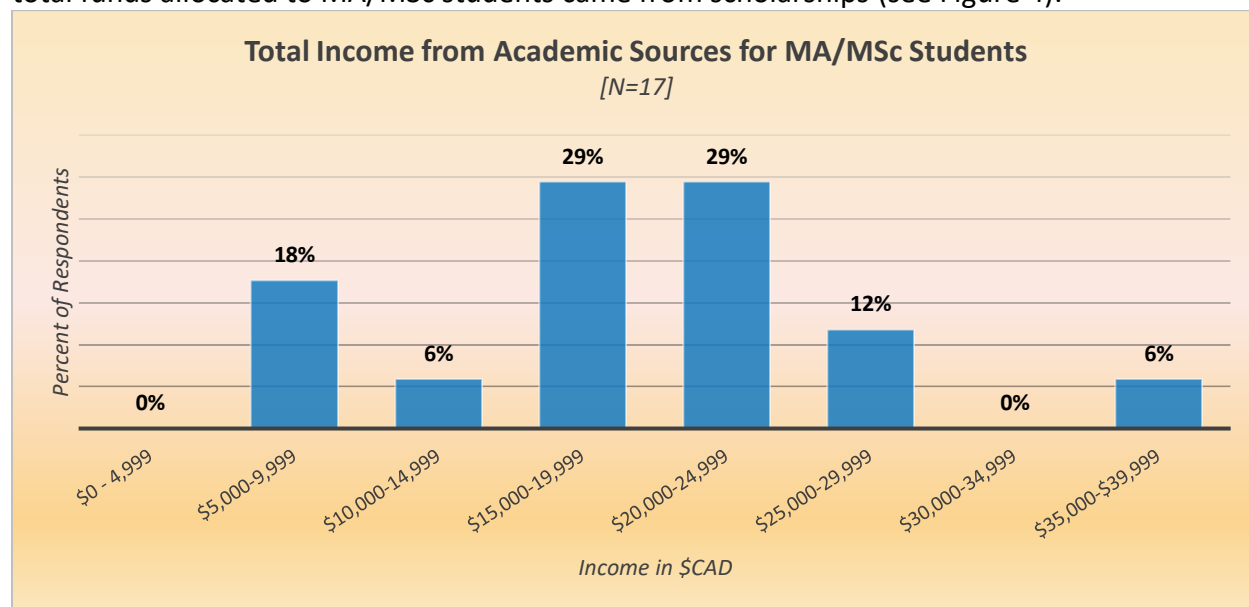


Figure 1. Yearly total income from academic sources, MA/MSc students.

	Supervisor Funding		Academic Income		Scholarship and/or Bursary Funding		Total		Diff. of Means
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Average	Median	
Total	\$6,952	\$6,500	\$5,478	\$5,279	\$7,572	\$4,159	\$20,002	\$15,938	\$9,128
Canadian	\$7,263	\$6,625	\$5,358	\$5,279	\$9,074	\$5,833	\$21,694	\$17,738	
Internat.	\$5,500	\$6,500	\$6,000	\$8,000	\$1,067	\$0	\$12,567	\$14,500	\$3,404
Physical	\$9,079	\$7,250	\$4,600	\$5,279	\$8,046	\$4,517	\$21,725	\$17,046	
Human	\$5,061	\$6,500	\$6,161	\$5,279	\$7,098	\$2,559	\$18,321	\$14,338	

Figure 2. Yearly totals for MA/MSc - breakdown by area of focus and status.

	Number of Students	
	MA/MSc	PhD
Canadian	14	14
International	3	11
Physical	8	8
Human	9	17

Figure 3. Breakdown of students by area of focus and Canadian/international status



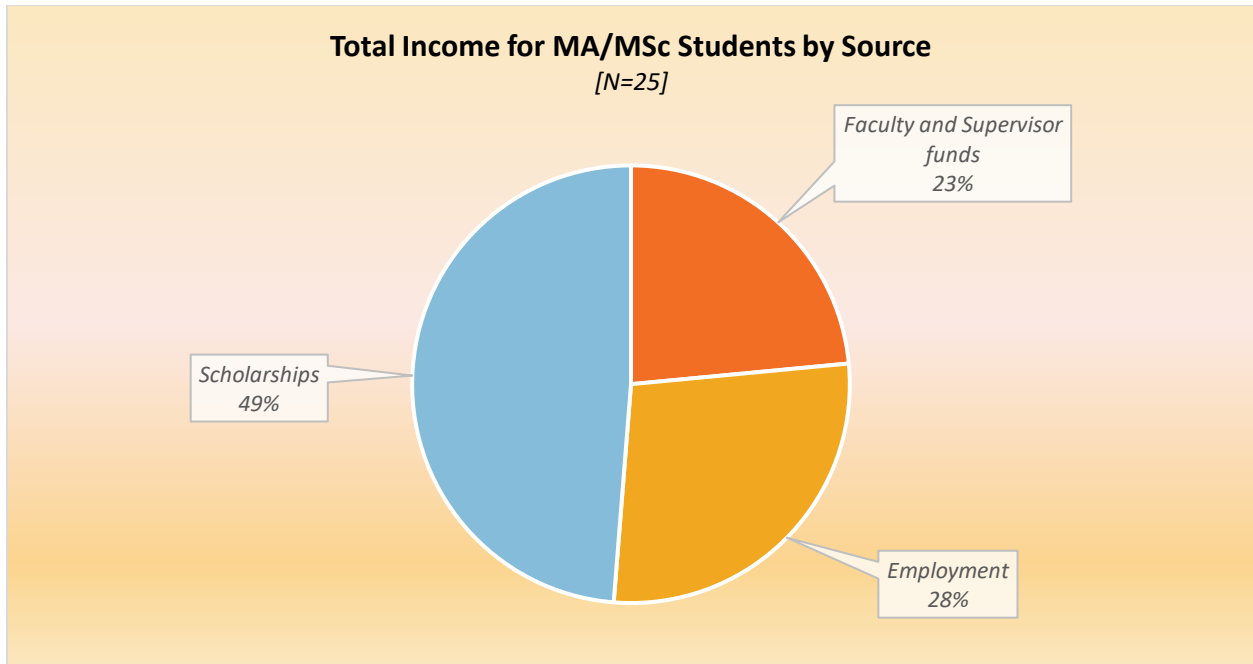


Figure 4. Total income by source for MA/MSc students.

For PhD students, the five students gaining between \$35,000 – 49,999 were “PhD1s” and “PhD2s” that were granted differential fee waivers (which offsets international tuition to in-province tuition), that amount to \$12,638 under “Faculty and Supervisor funds”. More than half (56%) of the total funds allocated to PhD students came from faculty, department, and supervisor funds.

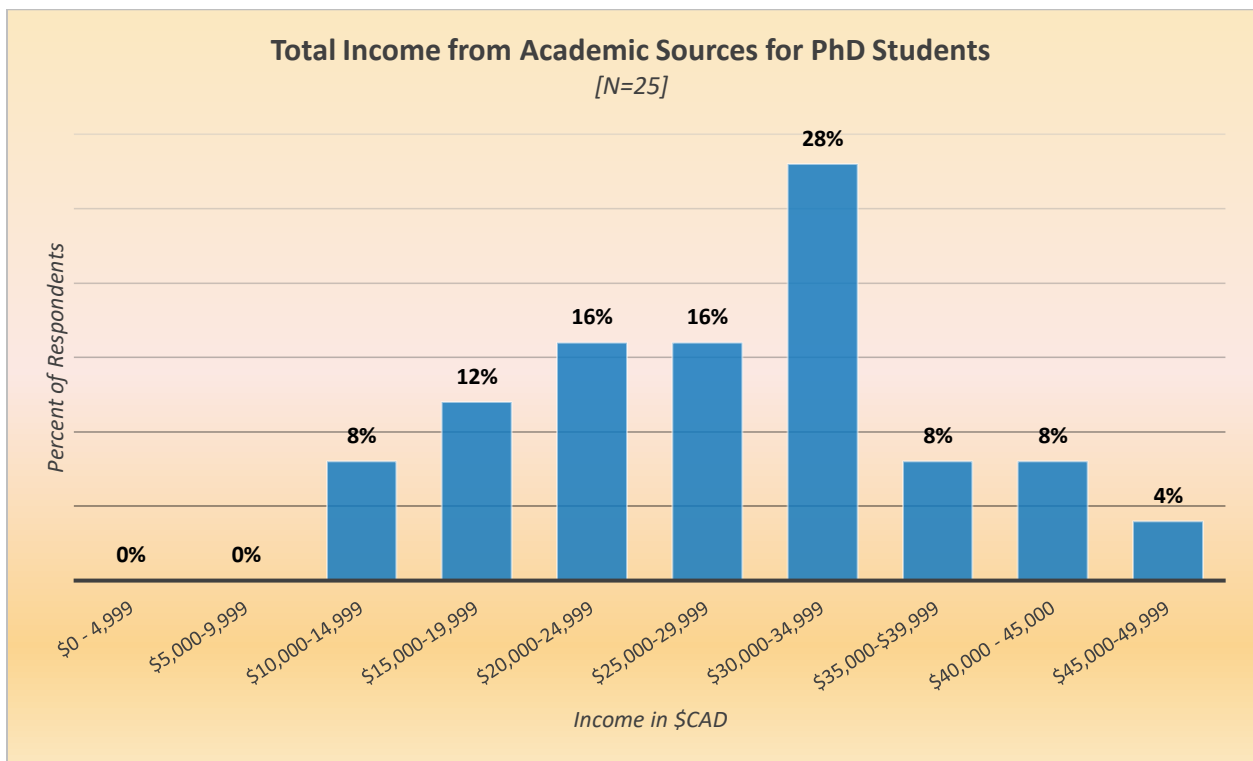


Figure 5. Yearly total income from academic sources, PhD students.

	Supervisor Funding		Academic Income		Scholarship and/or Bursary Funding		Total		Diff. of Means
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Average	Median	
Total	\$15,790	\$14,000	\$4,560	\$4,600	\$8,667	\$1,500	\$28,488	\$29,000	
Canadian	\$10,690	\$10,500	\$5,298	\$5,139	\$11,286	\$10,500	\$27,274	\$26,142	(\$2,758)
Internat.	\$22,281	\$20,000	\$3,526	\$3,260	\$5,000	\$2,500	\$30,032	\$30,390	
Physical	\$18,096	\$17,000	\$3,573	\$4,081	\$4,714	\$0	\$25,793	\$27,292	(\$3,963)
Human	\$14,706	\$13,000	\$5,054	\$5,000	\$10,294	\$5,000	\$29,756	\$32,138	

Figure 6. Yearly totals for PhDs - breakdown by area of focus and status.

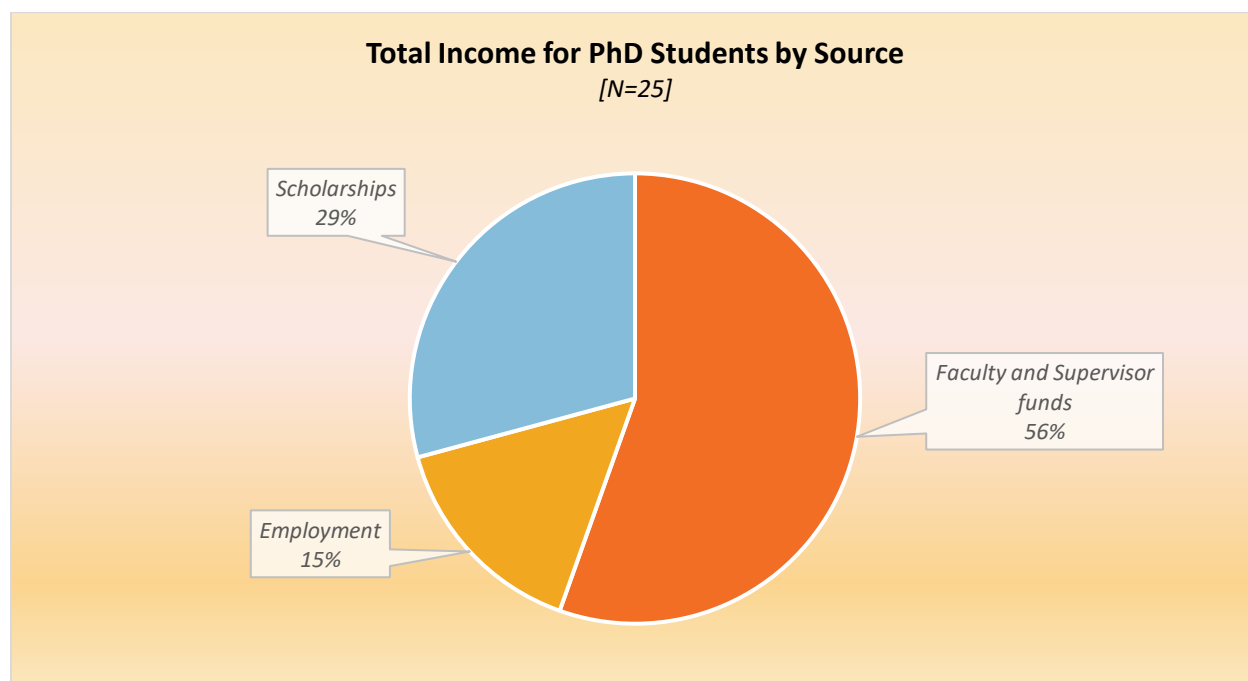


Figure 7. Total income by source for PhD students.

1.2 Living Expenses

Academic expenses among students can vary widely for a variety of reasons. Despite this, our goal was to capture “living expenses” that are incurred by all students, including rent, utilities, groceries, internet, transportation, and cell phones.

Based on calculations, the mean and median yearly living expenses of MA/MSc students are:

MEAN \$12,300

MEDIAN \$12,770

The mean and median yearly living expenses of PhD students are:

MEAN \$14,700

MEDIAN \$13,968

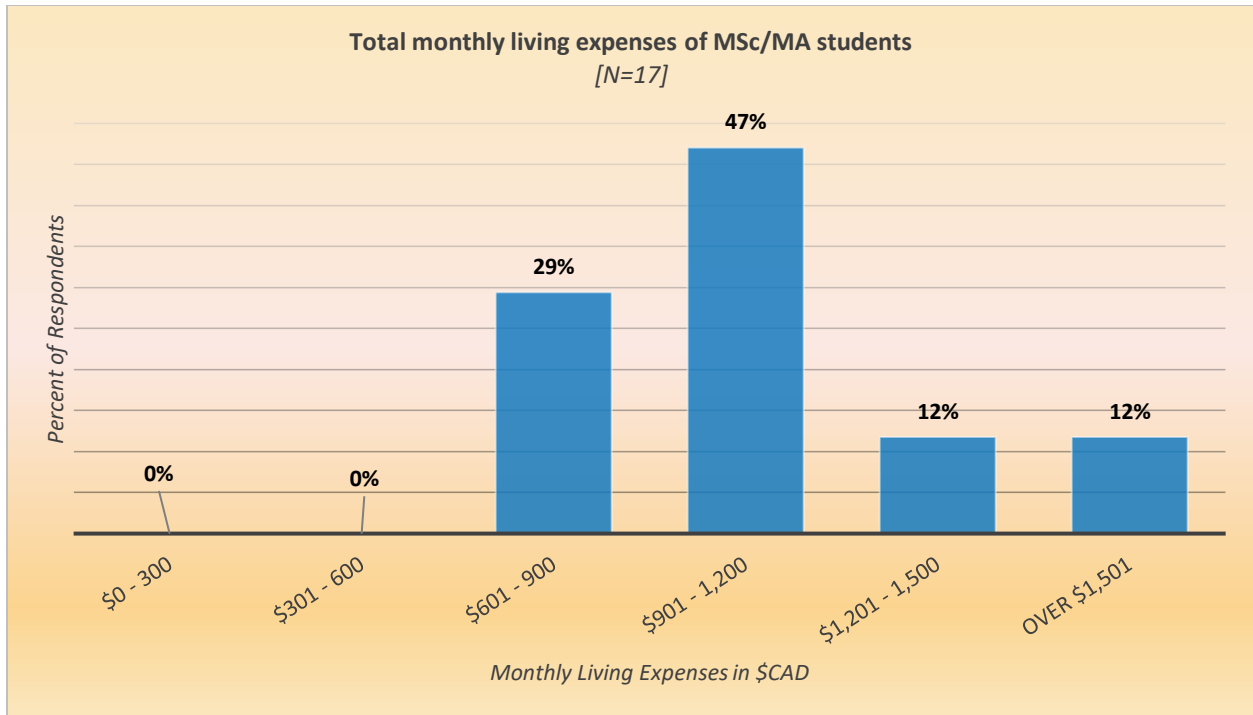


Figure 8. Monthly total expenses for MA/MSc students.

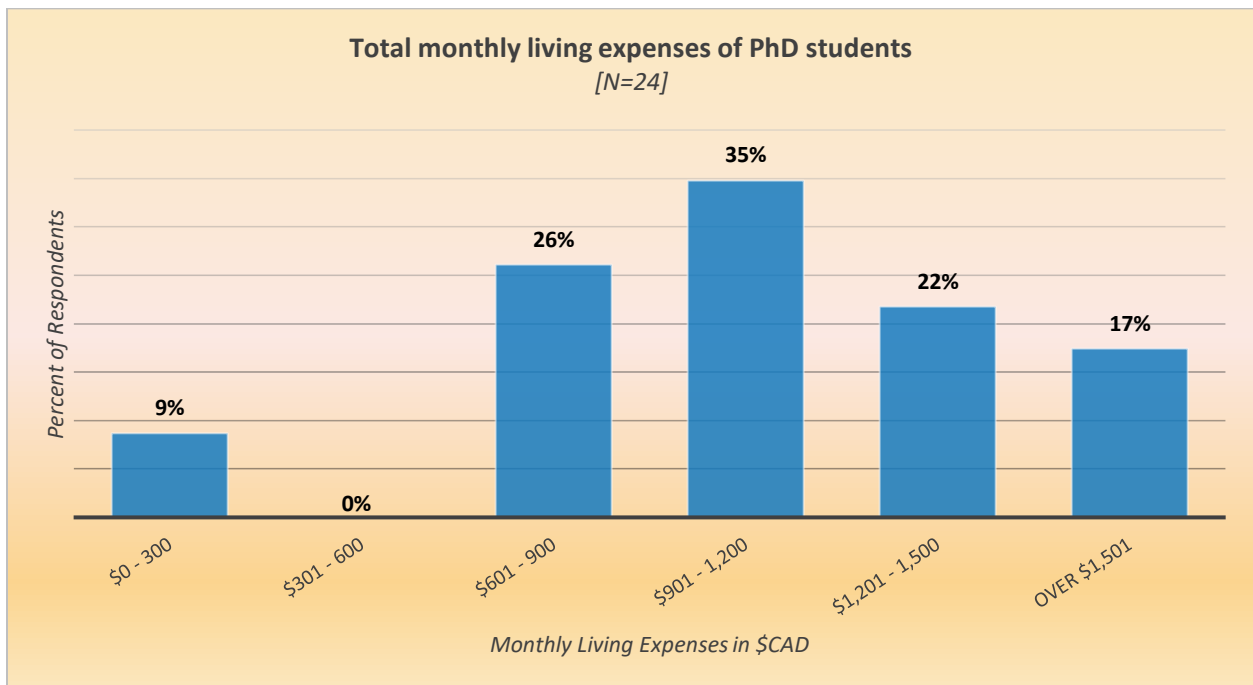


Figure 9. Monthly total expenses for PhD students.

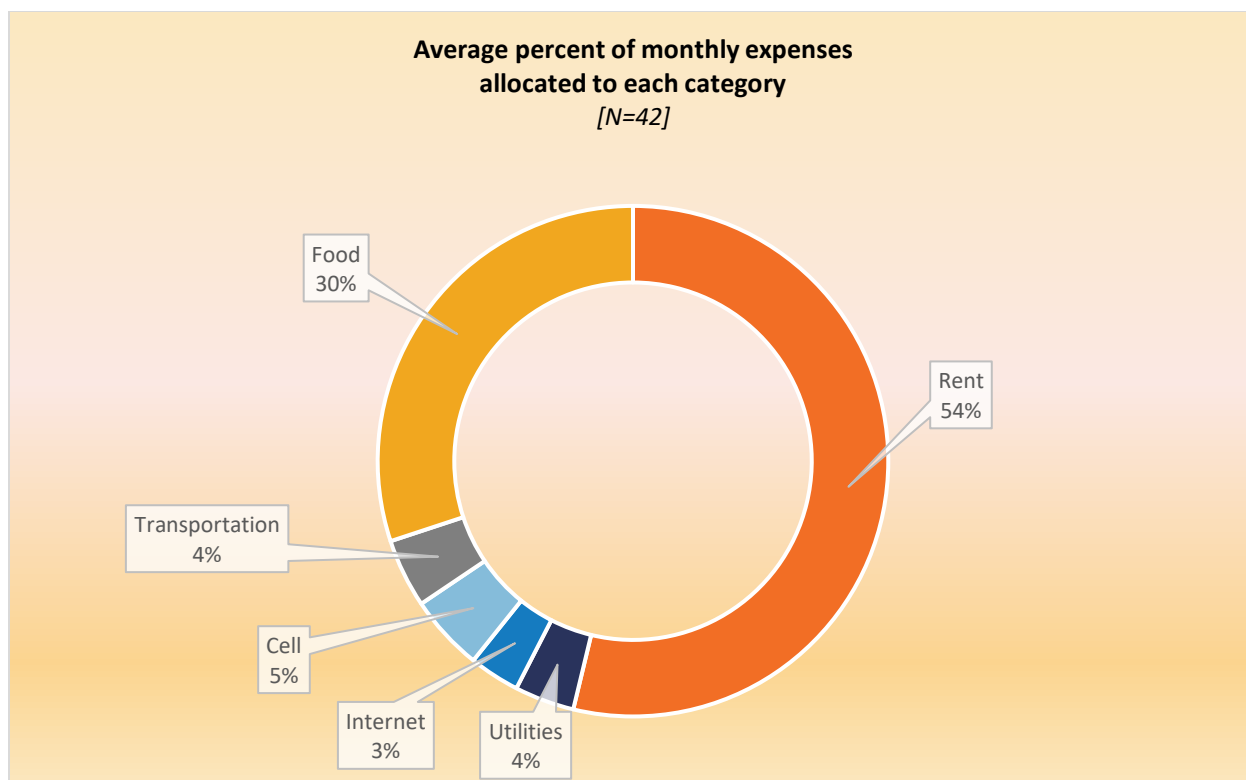


Figure 10. Average allocation of expenses reported by geography graduate students.

The McGill Scholarships and Student Aid website lists expected costs per student, indicating students should expect to spend 35 percent of their income on rent, 12 percent on food, 5 percent on utilities, and a combined 5 percent on cell phone plans and internet. It is important to note that they included other expected expenditures that we did not include on the survey (clothing, insurance, 'lattes').²

We considered the proportion of each person's monthly expenses in each of the six identified categories. On average, rent is the major expense students face. Respondents spend as much as 78.3 percent of their income on rent. Transportation was a small expense for most, though it did constitute a higher percentage of the budget for those with lower/no housing costs, presumably those living with family. The average combined cell phone and internet costs of students was 7.8 percent of one's budget.

Our survey suggests that the McGill Scholarships and Student Aid website estimations of expected costs per student underestimate key essential expenditures.

² <https://mcgill.ca/studentaid/finances/cost>

1.3 Income v. Expenses

To evaluate the extent to which students incur debt related to living expenses, we subtracted yearly living expenses from their reported annual income from academic sources. This year, we had additional tuition information, allowing for two distinct analyses: the difference between expenses and income with and without tuition. The red line on each graph marks the dividing line between those with a net gain and those with a net loss. Each colour marks a different calculation (orange showing just income and living expenses while blue adds tuition), which adds up to 100% (see Figures 11 and 12).

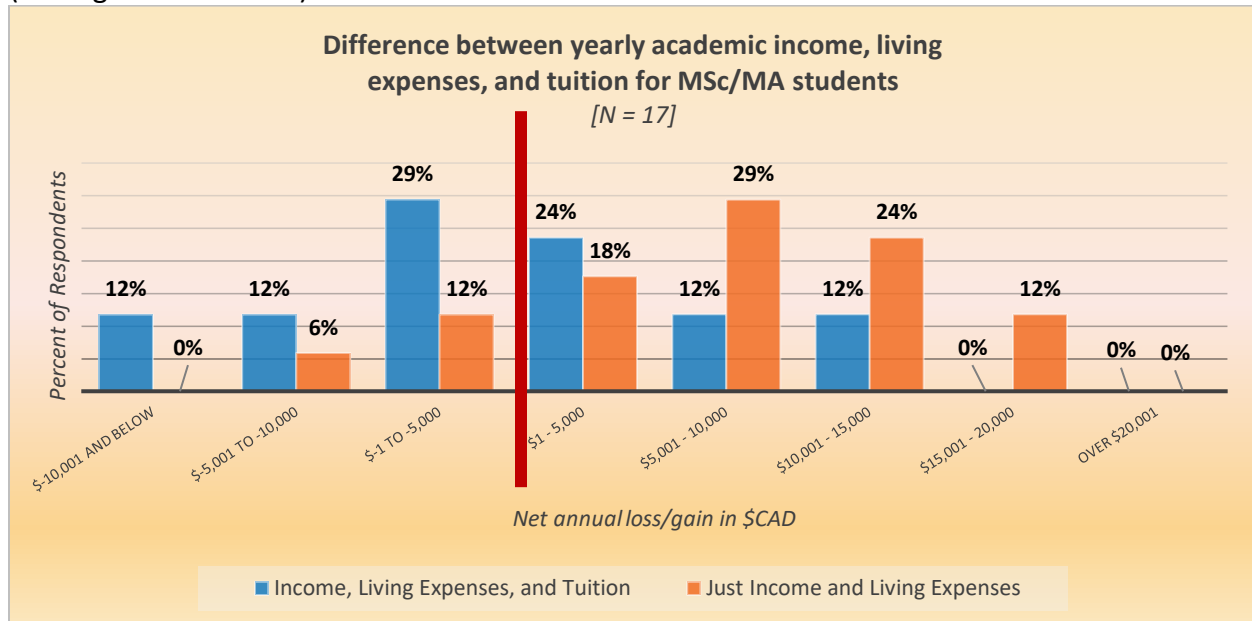


Figure 11. Average annual difference between academic income, living expenses, and tuition for MA/MSc students.

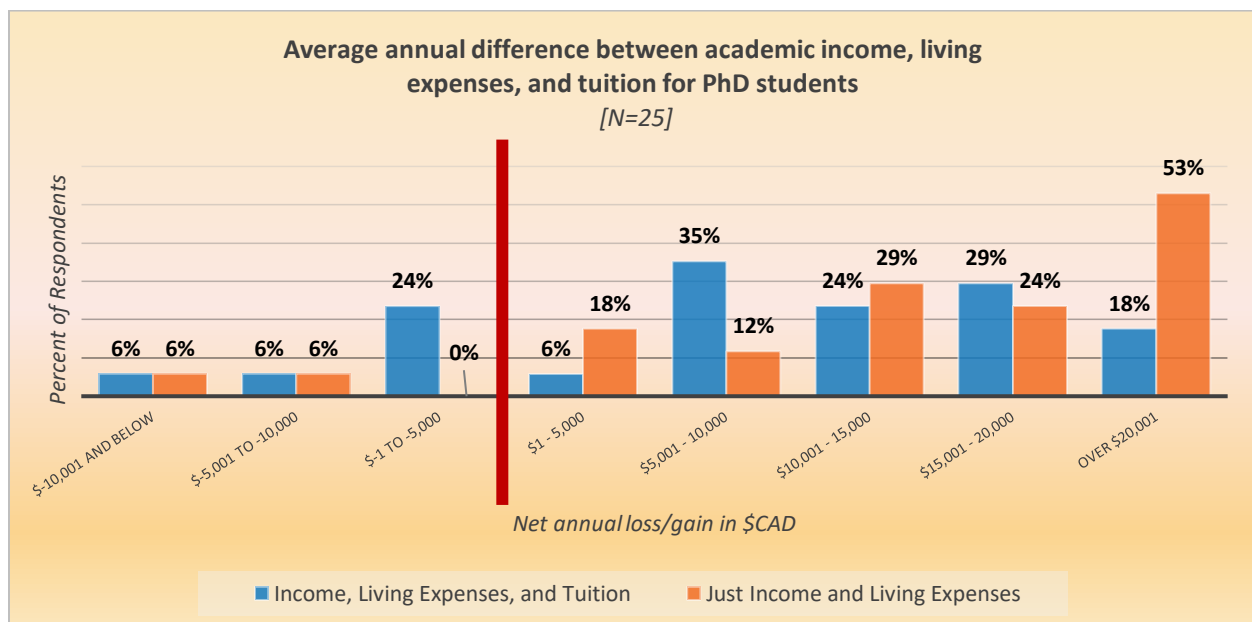


Figure 12. Average annual difference between academic income, living expenses, and tuition for PhD students.

2 - Funding and Finance

In this section, we consider specifics with regard to **Funding and Finance**. Unlike in last year's survey, we did not have first year and returning students provide different figures for different years, instead asking all students to provide their actual and expected expenses for this year.

2.1 Supervisory and Faculty Funding

Respondents were asked about the funding they received from their supervisor and/or stipends received from the department.

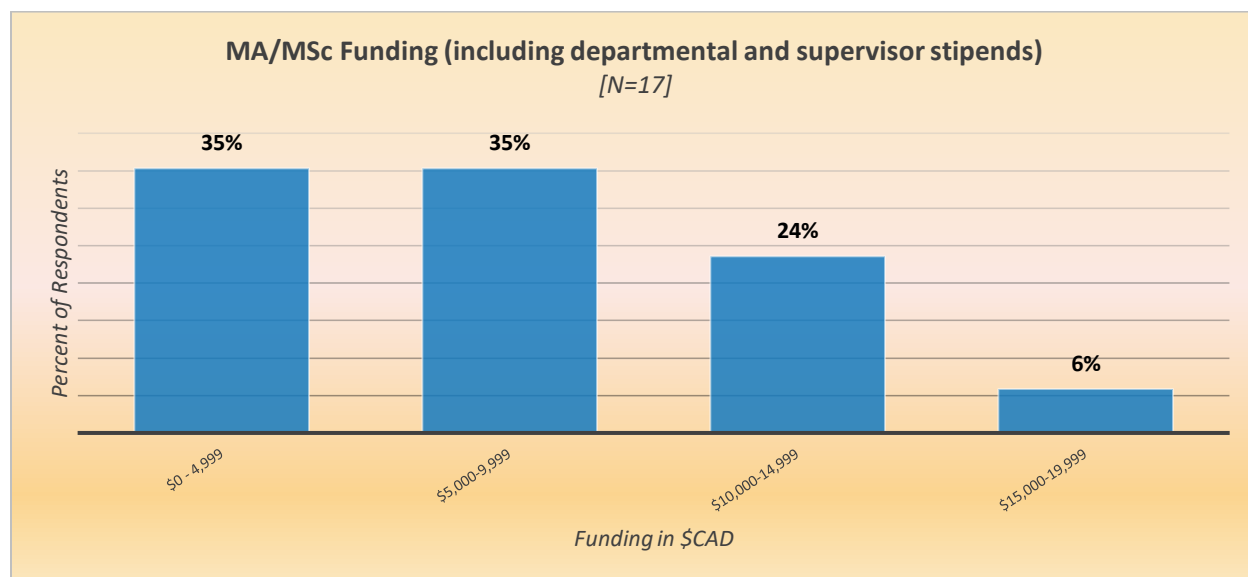


Figure 13. Funding for MA/MSc students from faculty and supervisors.

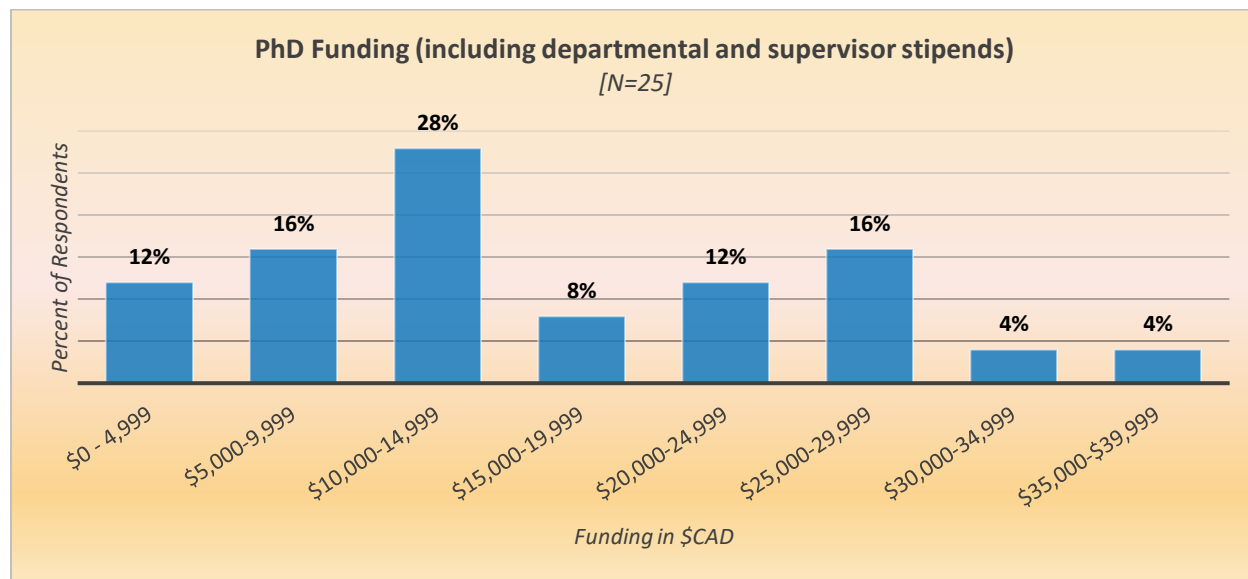


Figure 14. Funding for PhD students from faculty and supervisors.

While the average of funding for MA/MSc students is \$6,952, 82 percent of respondents received \$10,000 or less. This is most likely due to different program years that MA/MSc students are in (e.g. MA/MSc3 having less funding). Nearly three-quarters (72%) of PhD students received \$20,000 or less from their supervisor(s) or the department, the average allocation being \$15,790. The students with the six highest funds (\$25,000 – 39,999) from supervisors and the department are all PhD 1-3 international students, which is most likely attributed to these funds being used as a differential fee waiver to compensate for the international tuition as discussed in Section 1.

2.2 Academic Employment

Teaching assistantships were by far the most common form of academic employment for all graduate students, with two 90-hour appointments for MA/MSc students and at least one 45-hour appointment for PhD students during the 2019/2020 school year being the most common (see Figures 15 and 16). Students also had various forms of academic employment including exam invigilation, library efforts, and course lecturing.

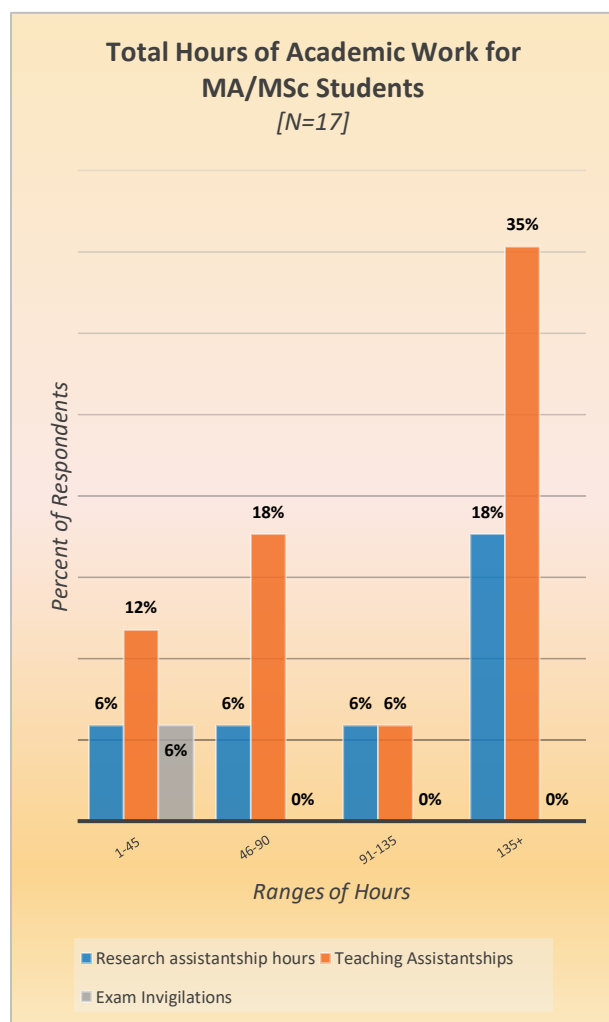


Figure 15. Hours of work for MA/MSc students.

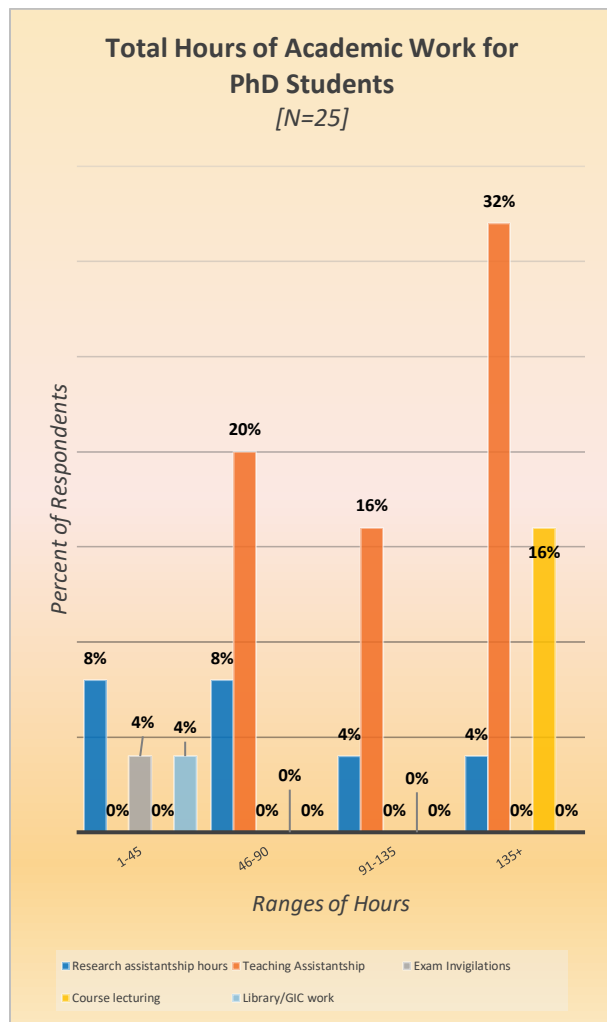


Figure 16. Hours of work for PhD students.

2.3 Bursaries, Grants, Scholarships

Respondents were asked about the various scholarships and grants from organizations such as the National Science and Engineering Research Council, Le Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture, and other national, provincial, or other bodies that issue similar awards. These funds are not required to be paid back. Respondents were asked: “What is your bursary and/or scholarship funding for the 2019/2020 academic year? (Bursary and/or scholarship funding refers to any money you receive in the form of a fellowship, grant, or other award from organizations such as NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC, FRQNT, FRQS, and FRQSC.)”

The majority of student respondents indicated that receive under \$4,999 in scholarships.

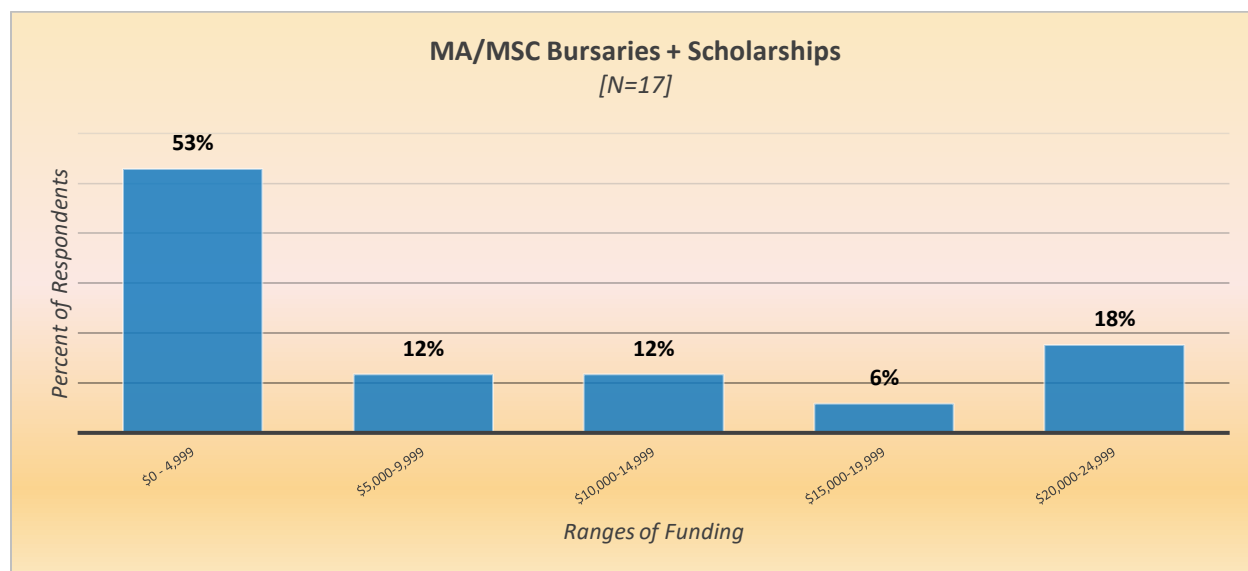


Figure 17. Bursaries and Scholarships for MA/MSc students.

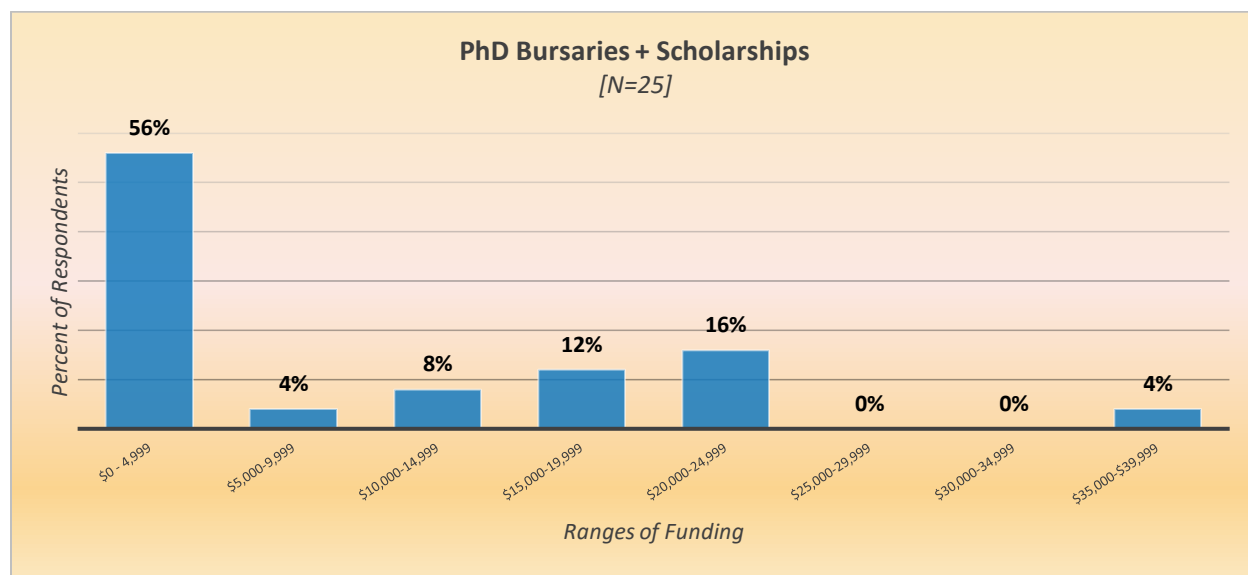


Figure 18. Bursaries and Scholarships for PhD students.

2.4 Overall Funding Situation

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their overall funding situation. Of those responding, 19 percent of all respondents (N=42) indicated they acquired government-based student loans (e.g. OSAP, StudentAid BC). Seventeen percent took other loans/lines of credit for their graduate studies. Nearly a quarter (24%) of students have sought employment outside of McGill (e.g. public or private sectors, 'gig' jobs like Uber, Fiverr, SkipTheDishes). Lastly, 31 percent of respondents received financial support from their family or partners.

2.5 Tuition

As indicated in Figure 19, the vast majority of students paid under \$4,999 of tuition. A third of all respondents, both MA/MSc and PhD students indicated that they paid \$5,000 to \$25,000 in tuition, a significant cost of education (see Figure 20). To put the cost of tuition for two-thirds of students into perspective, two 90-hour TA-ships are roughly \$5,000.

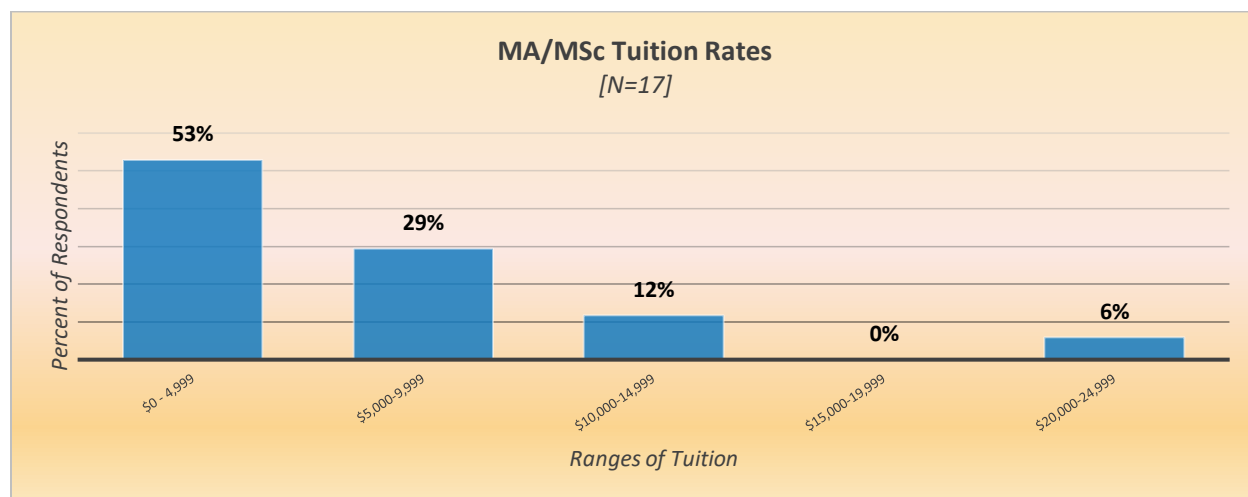


Figure 19. Tuition for MA/MSc students.

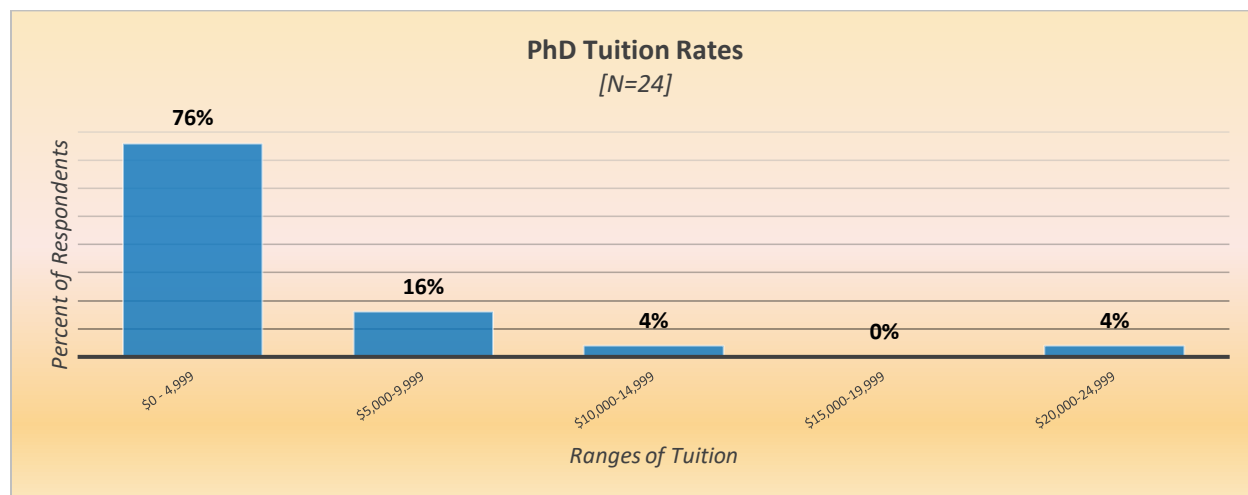


Figure 20. Tuition for PhD students.

3 – Fieldwork

3.1 Location

Research, not limited to **fieldwork**, can be a costly endeavour for any student depending on the location. Nearly one-third of students undertake fieldwork on another continent, which largely dictates the costs of fieldwork. Almost two-thirds of students undertake research within Canada, archival research, or a combination of both. Respondents selected multiple options from possible locations, indicated in the graph below.

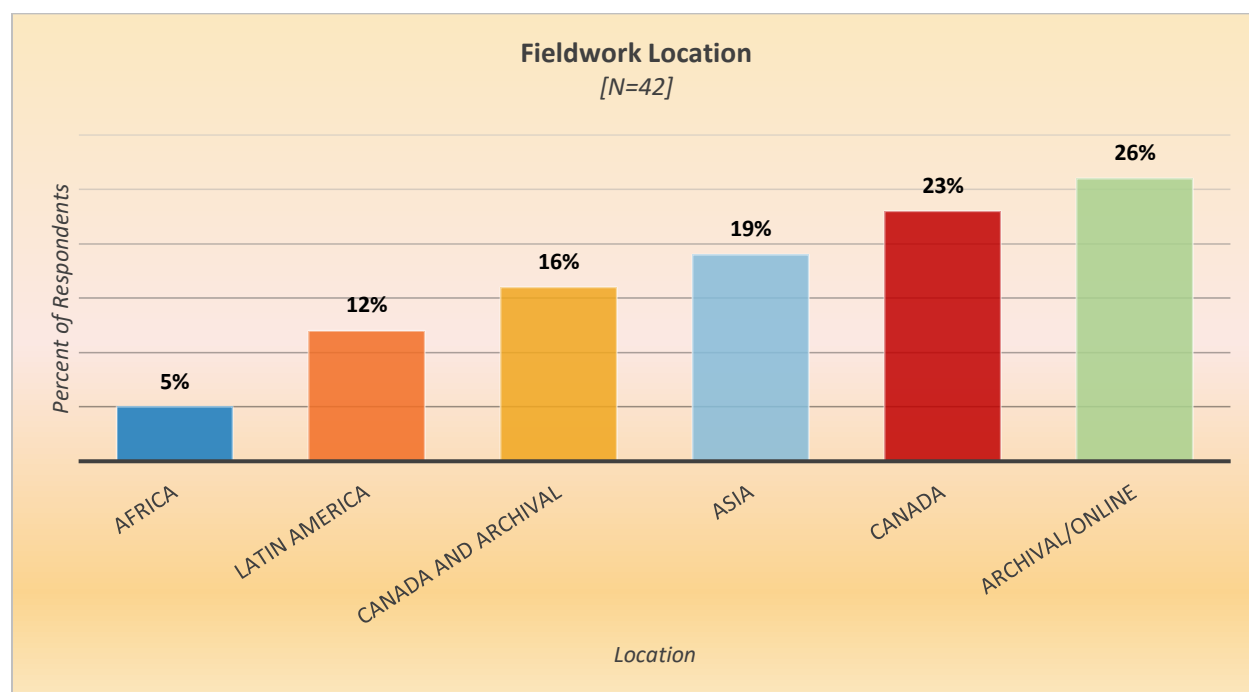


Figure 21. Fieldwork location.

3.2 Expenses

Over one-fifth of respondents indicated no cost for research or fieldwork (see Figure 22). The outer pie graph indicates total expenses (key to the left) and the inner pie chart represents the total costs fieldwork costs that were not reimbursed (key on the bottom). Over one-quarter of respondents indicated they incurred no fieldwork costs, while a wide range of respondents indicated they paid fieldwork costs out-of-pocket, with one outlier paying over \$20,000 of fieldwork costs out of pocket.

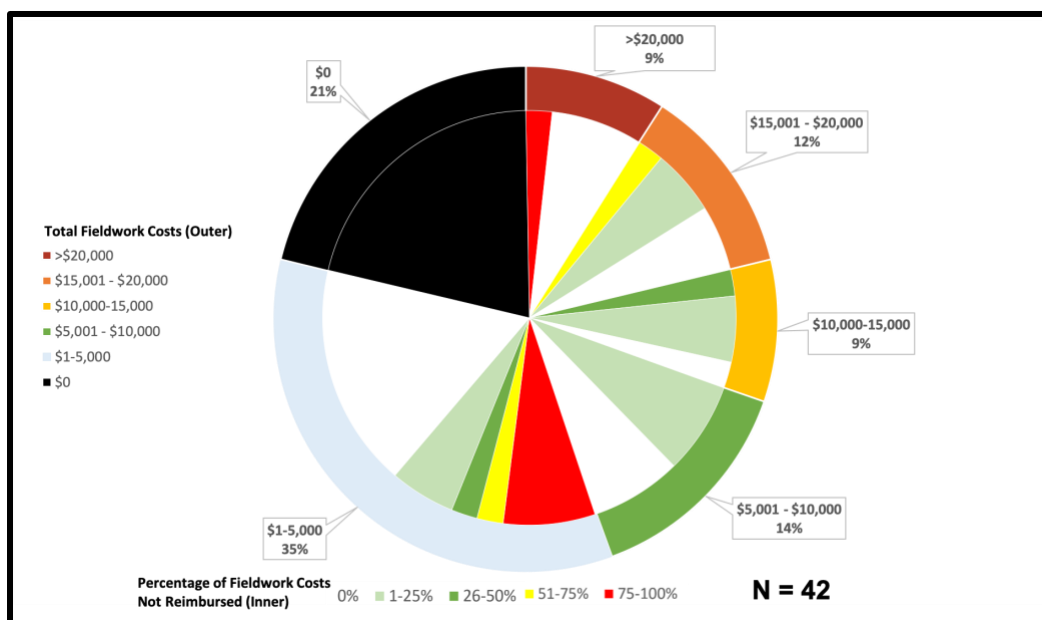


Figure 22. Not reimbursed fieldwork expenses.

As indicated in Figure 23, almost three-quarters of respondents that incurred costs (not including those that had no fieldwork costs) paid their fieldwork costs out-of-pocket to be reimbursed later (the inner pie graph). This can put students in precarious financial situations, given that some may not have enough money saved, thus requiring additional employment or loans in order to conduct fieldwork, despite some stints of fieldwork being longer than a year.

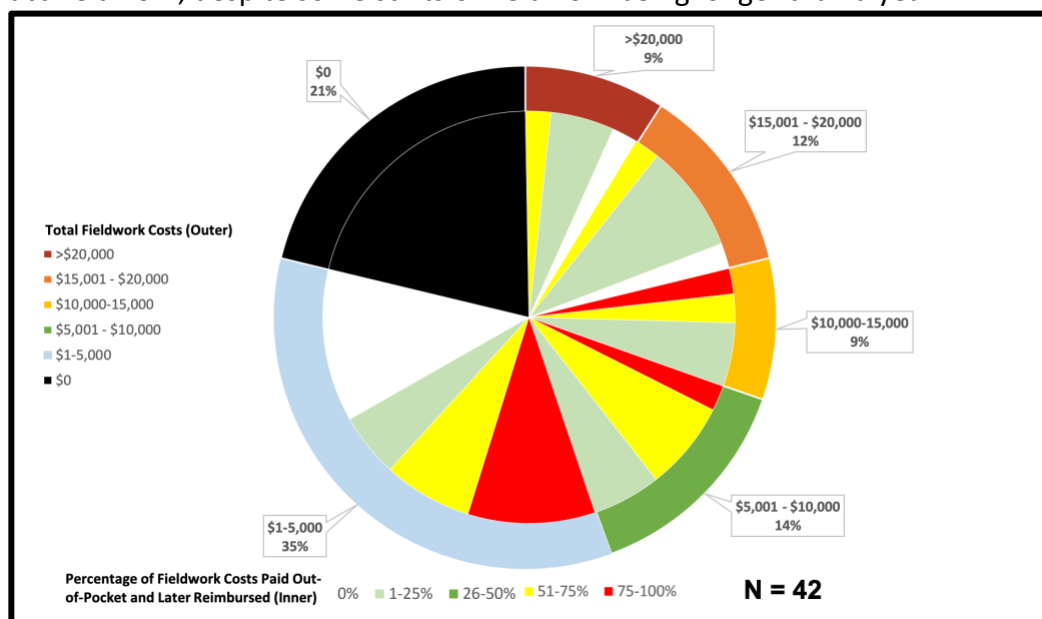


Figure 23. Reimbursed fieldwork expenses.

3.3 Conferences

According to respondents, 17 students attended 14 international conferences in the 2018/2019 academic year. Before COVID-19 disrupted conferences, 31 students planned on attending 23

different conferences in the 2019/2020 academic year. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents that did attend conferences did not have to pay any conference fees out-of-pocket, though, as Figures 24 and 25 indicate, several outliers did incur significant costs. Despite the well-funded conference travel students have, over two-thirds of those attending conferences are required to pay out of pocket before being reimbursed. The up-front demand of capital on students may force them to navigate uncertain and difficult circumstances in the present or in the future (e.g. working extra to build up savings or applying for credit or loans).

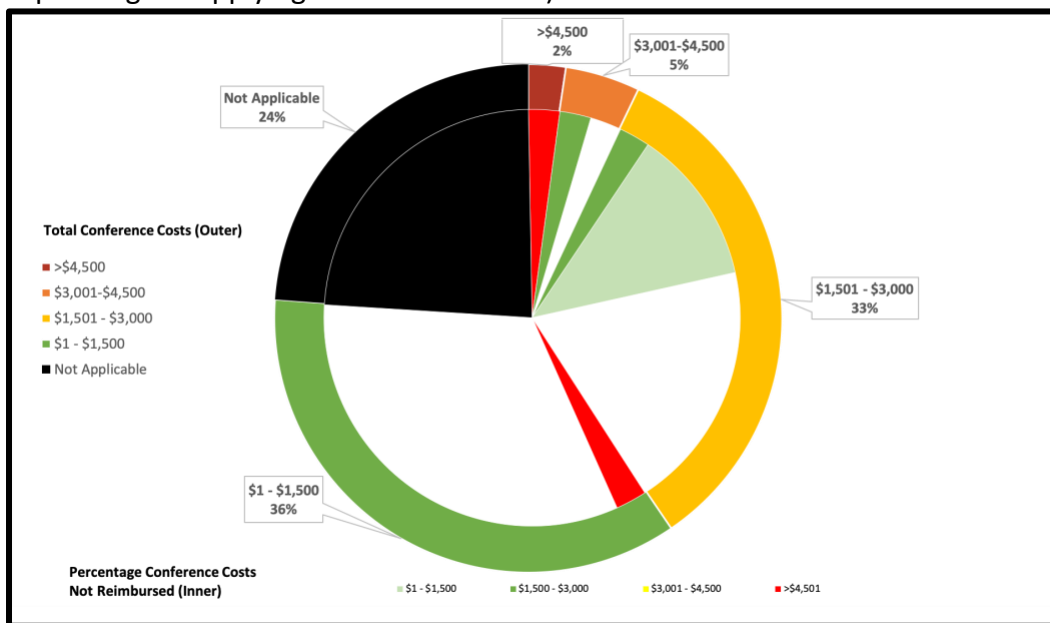


Figure 24. Reimbursed conference costs.

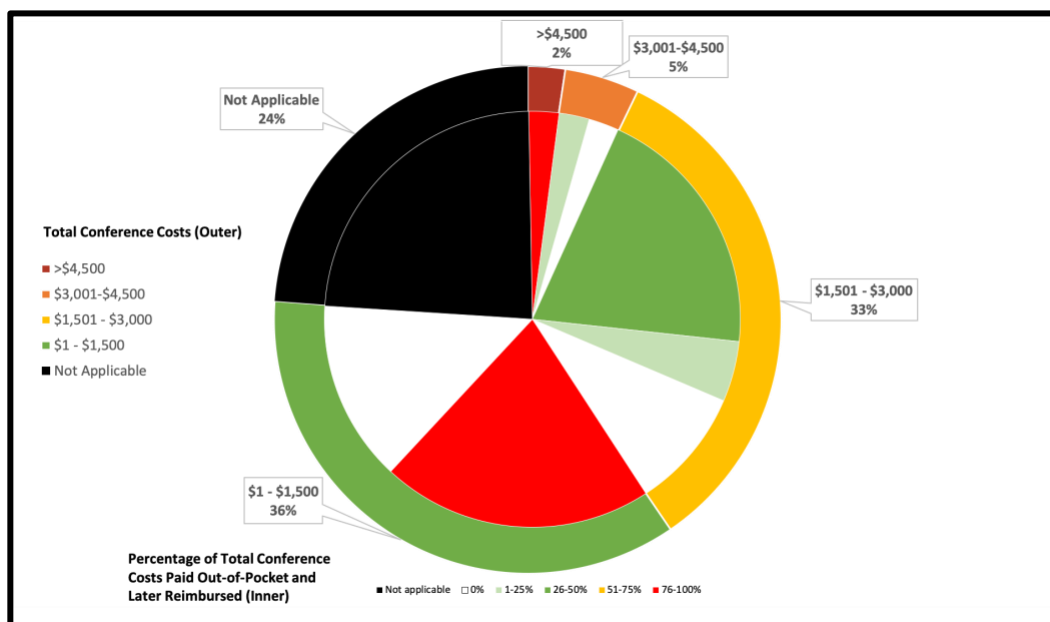


Figure 25. Not reimbursed conference costs.

3.4 Other Academic Expenses

Outside of living, conferences, and fieldwork expenses, participants were also asked “Indicate the total cost of all other research/academic/fieldwork related expenses you have incurred over the 2019/2020 Academic Year. (These could be funds for translation services, transcription, the purchasing of new laptops, hard drives, etc.)” Although the majority of students (over 75%) incur either no costs or under \$1-\$1,500, nearly a quarter of students pay over \$1,501 in “other” academic costs (see Figure 26).

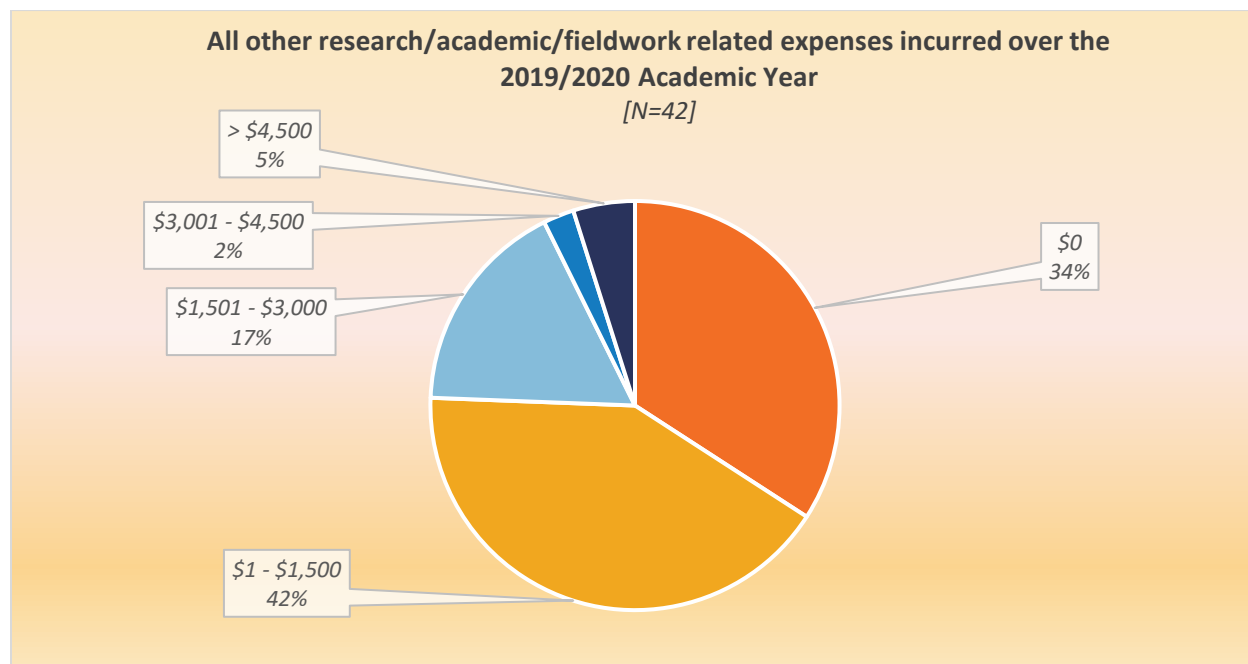


Figure 26. All other academic expenses.



4 – Living Arrangements

4.1 Neighbourhoods

Respondents were asked about the areas of Montreal in which they live. We collected the Forward Sortation Areas (FSAs) of respondents to get a detailed idea as to where geography grad students live around Montreal. FSAs provide a more detailed look at communities, as Montreal's boroughs sometimes contain multiple FSAs.

Respondents are spread-out across Montreal and on-island suburbs (see Figure 27). A quarter of respondents live in the Plateau and another quarter are spread between the South West and Ville Marie. As indicated in Figure 28, Ten percent of respondents live in each Verdun and Outremont.

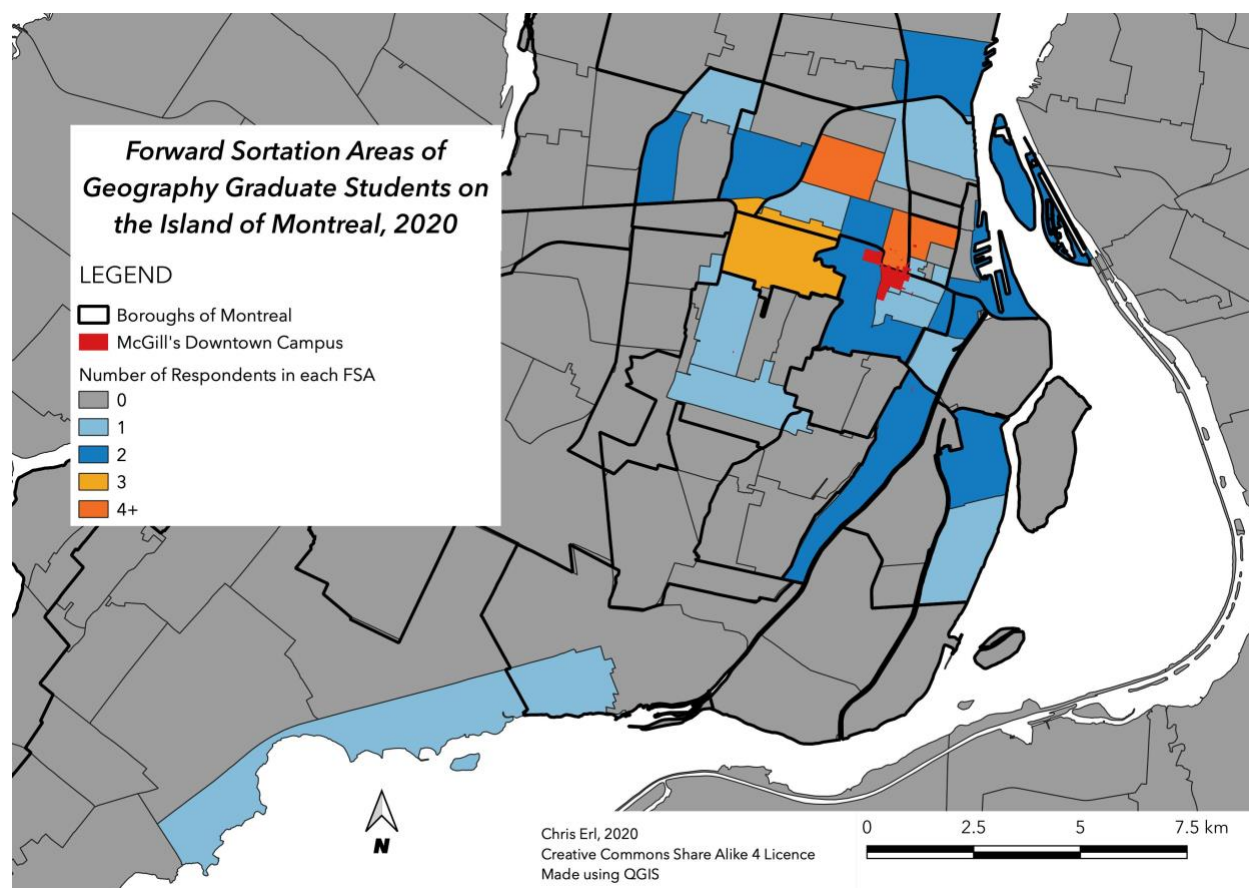


Figure 27. Map of McGill geography graduate students by FSA.

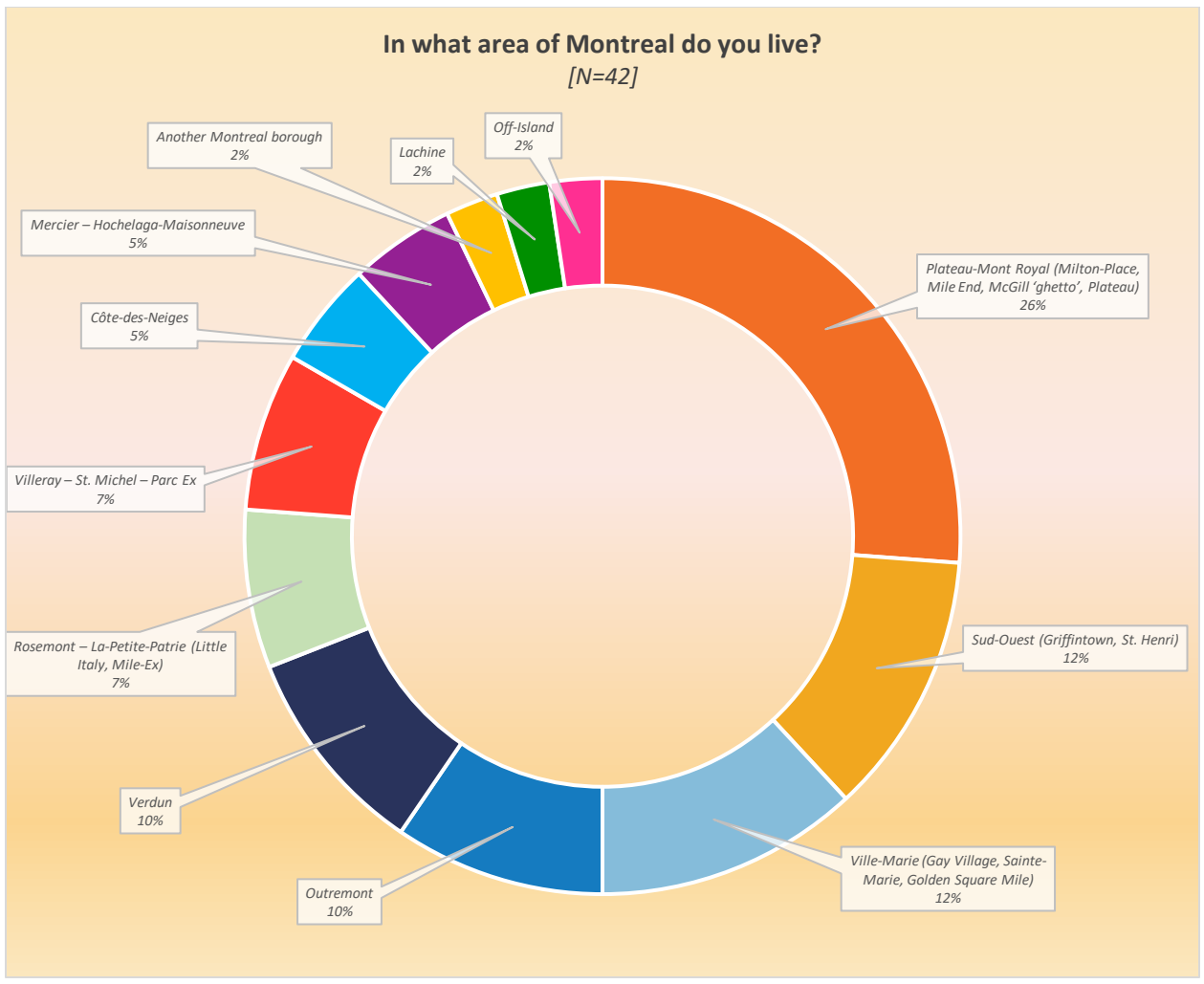


Figure 28. In what area of Montreal do you live?

Going forward, it may be beneficial to expand our living arrangement questions to capture those living further from Montreal. Particularly in light of McGill’s decision to conduct most classes online for the Fall 2020 semester, asking questions about the places people live while completing their degree even if those places are not in Montreal could be useful given the diversity of living costs, funding packages, and other precarious living circumstances COVID-19 has brought on.



4.2 Roommates and Rent

Participants were asked to indicate what their present living situation is given a range of options to select. One quarter of respondents live alone while another quarter live with their spouse or partners. As indicated in Figure 29, approximately 42 percent of respondents live with a number of roommates and 7 percent live with family.

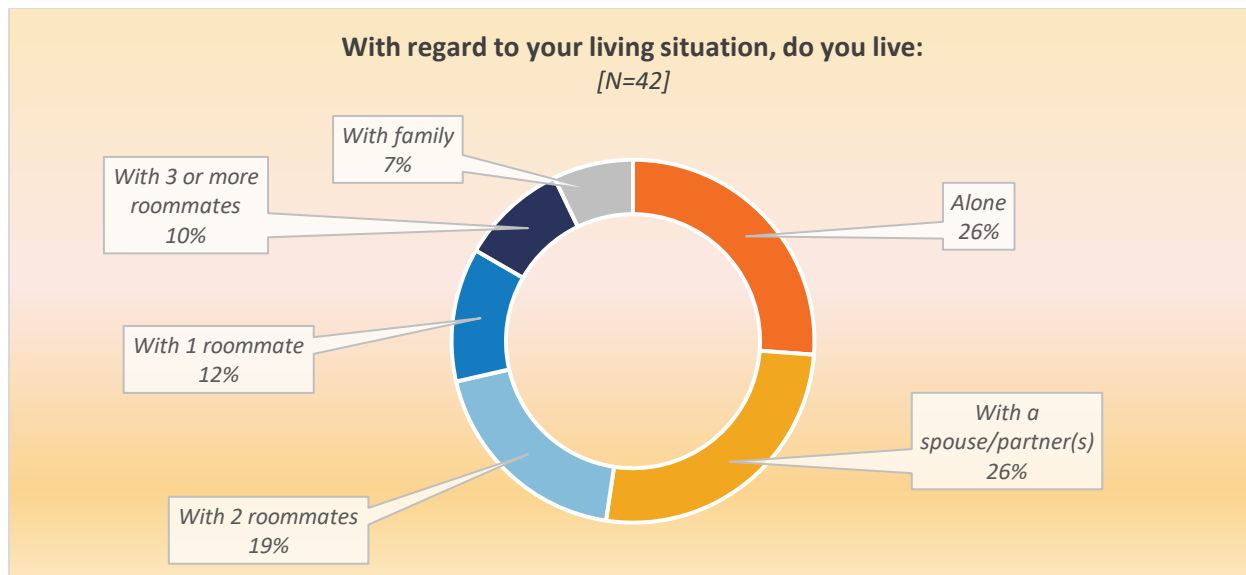


Figure 29. Living situations.

Respondents were also asked why they chose the location where they now live and were able to select multiple options. Half of respondents listed desirable location and/or inexpensive rent as a motivating factor. Only 5 percent listed safety as a reason (see Figure 30).

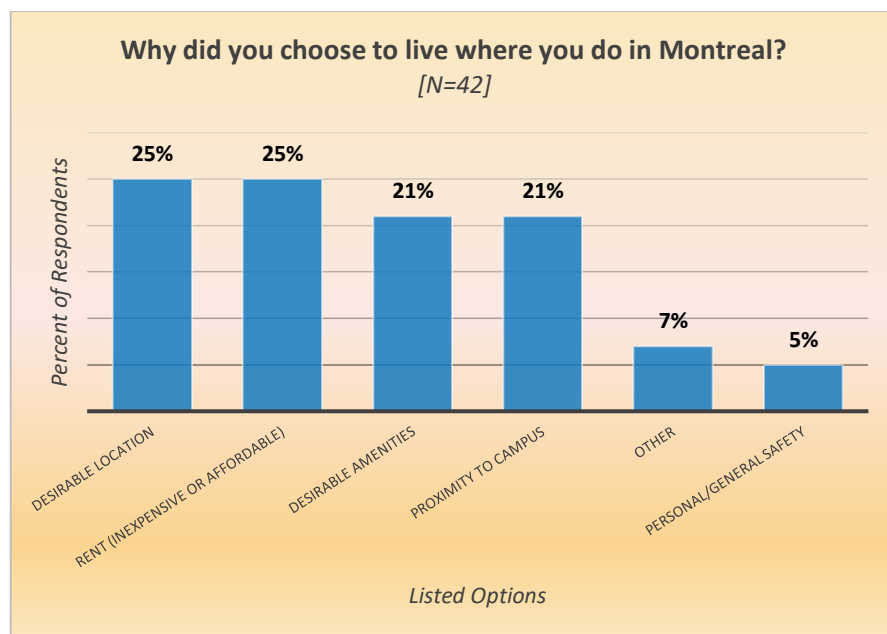


Figure 30. Choice of accommodation.

In contrast to last year, we collected information on the 2019/2020 rent situation of students rather than breaking costs down by cohort. In the previous iteration of the survey, there was confusion over the years we were inquiring about, so this year's question focused on the expected monthly rent costs for the 2019/2020 academic year.

The majority of respondents, as shown in Figure 31, listed rent costs under \$600 per month. Only 3 percent of respondents had rents over \$1,500 per month.

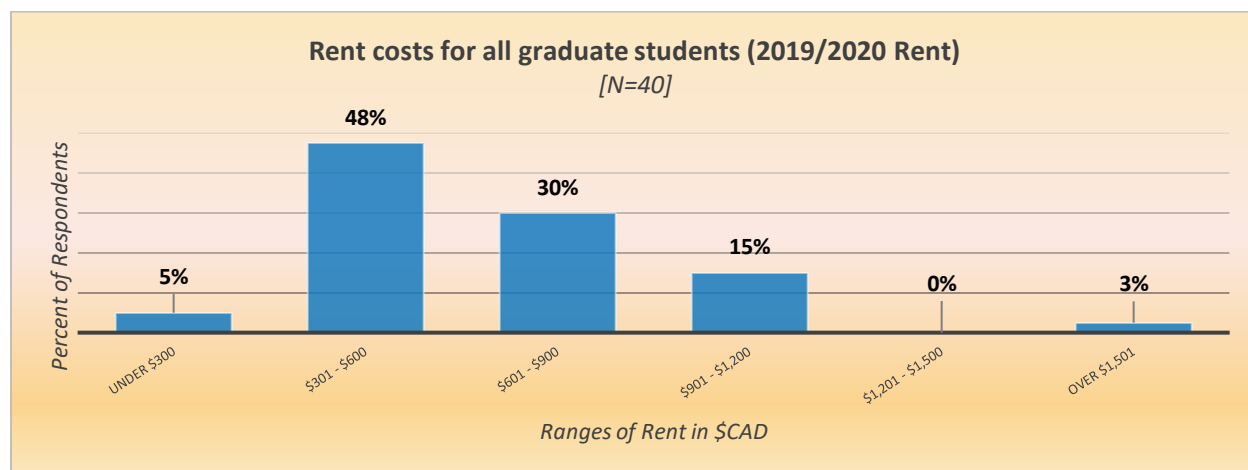


Figure 31. Monthly rent costs.

The average monthly rent by living situation provides us with further insight into costs. Respondents who live alone have much higher average monthly rents, while those who live with a large group of people (3 or more roommates) have an average monthly rent of \$473.25

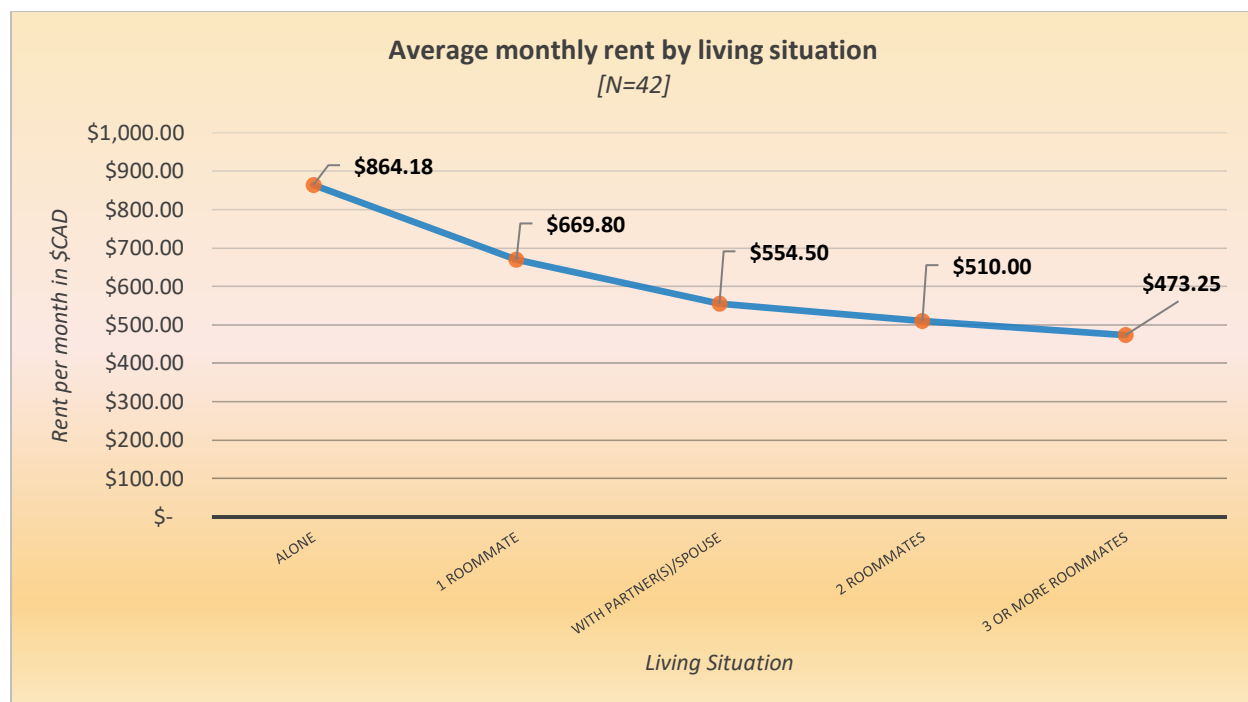


Figure 32. Average rent v. Living Situation.

4.3 Transportation

We asked participants three questions relating to transportation, which sought to understand how people get to McGill at different points in the year and how much students spend on their primary modes of transportation.

The results of the questions on transportation method show the graduate student population to be active and focused on public transit. Respondents were given an opportunity to select as many transportation methods as they use. Fifty-six percent of respondents cycled in the summer and spring and while many transferred to the metro by winter (nearly seventy percent), the percent of respondents walking remained mostly consistent throughout the year (see Figure 33).

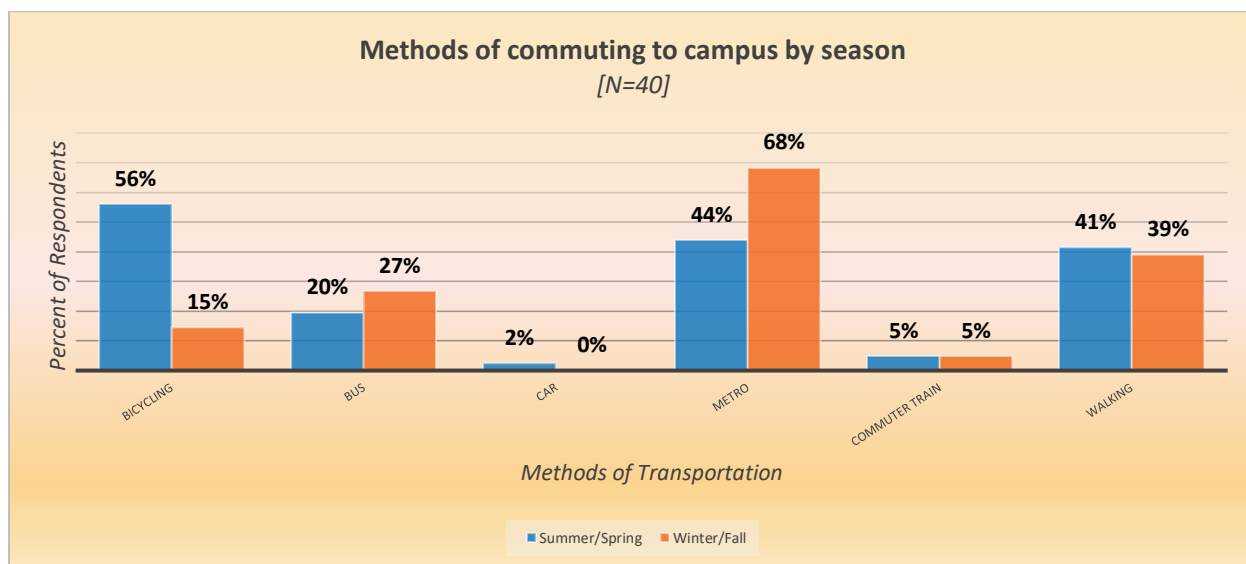


Figure 33. Methods of commuting to campus by season

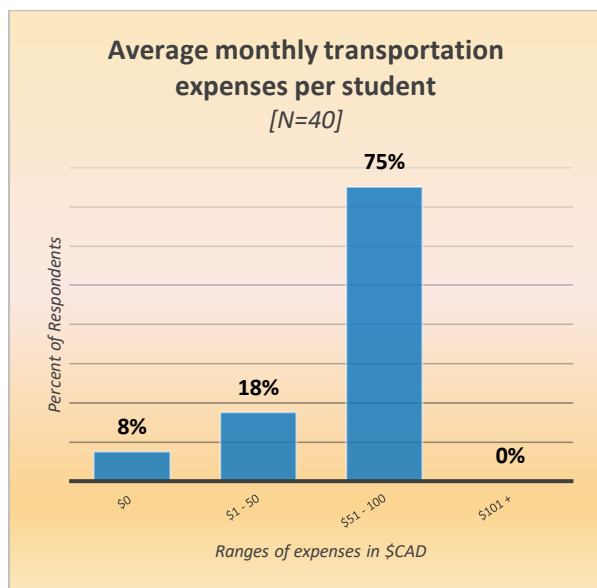


Figure 34. Monthly transportation expenses.

The overwhelming majority of respondents listed their transportation costs in the range of \$51 to \$100 (see Figure 44). This is likely because of our access to a reduced STM Monthly Fare, which is \$51.

Costs relating to transportation can be connected to distance from campus. While accommodation further from McGill may be cheaper, the added expense of regular transportation must be factored in.

4.4 Other Essential Expenses

We asked respondents about other essential expenses. These are, namely, their grocery costs, their extra utilities expenses, and their spending on cell phones and internet.

One of the most important expenses we all face comes at the grocery store. Despite this, it is still hard to find an average food expenditure amount. StatsCan and Health Canada both monitor the cost of food across the country, but do not publish averages or data. Instead, we have to turn to available online cost-of-living calculators which use calculations based on available market data for regular foodstuffs. Estimations vary widely, with some sites indicating a single person can get by on **\$200** per month,³ while others indicate a balanced omnivore's diet will cost **\$405** per month.⁴

As with last year, there was wide variation in the amount each respondent spent on food, but the average monthly food cost for respondents was **\$337** (see Figure 35). Just shy of a majority of respondents indicated they spent between \$201 and \$400 per month on food, within the ranges of the estimations available online. Higher costs may be associated with one's having dependents, specialized dietary needs, or grocery stores available in their area.

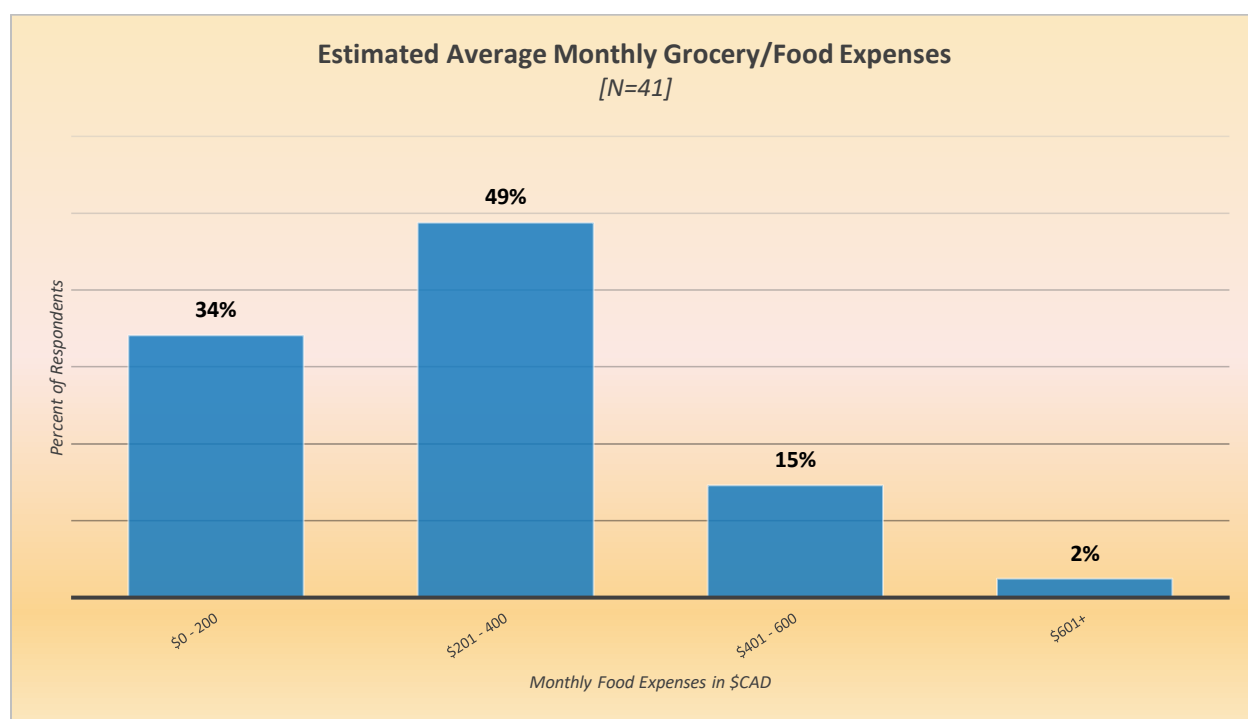


Figure 35. Monthly grocery expenses.

³ Lowest Rates, "This is how much it costs to live in Montreal in 2019," accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.lowestrates.ca/blog/finance/how-much-it-costs-live-montreal-2019>

⁴ Numbeo, "Food Prices in Montreal, Canada" accessed February 7, 2018, <https://www.numbeo.com/food-prices/in/Montreal>

The remaining expenses indicate that many respondents economize efficiently. The majority of respondents spent less than \$50 each month on utilities, internet, and their cell phones, with a very small minority spending more than \$100 on each.

As noted in Figure 36, respondents noted few additional utilities costs, with 72 percent indicating they spent less than \$50 per month on heat, water, and electricity.

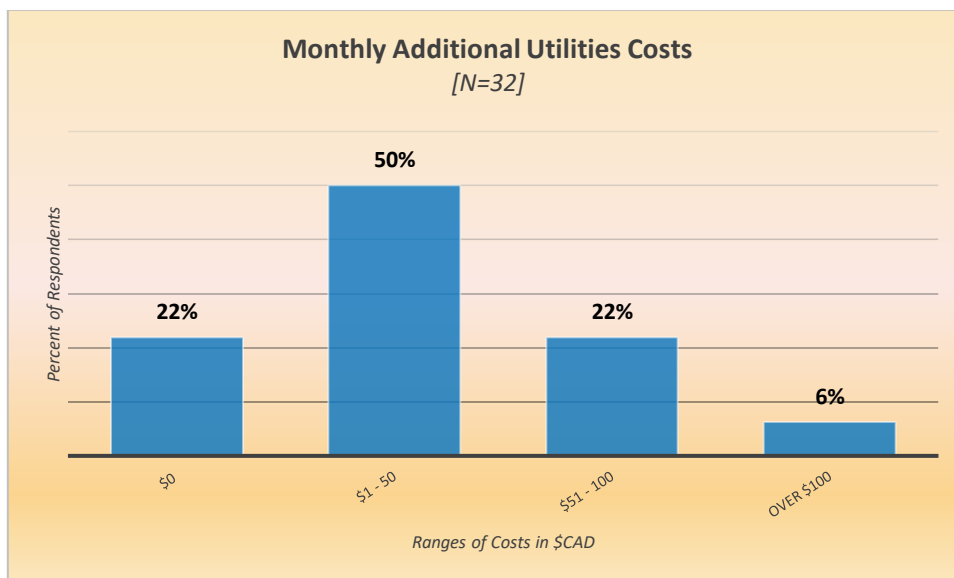


Figure 36. Additional utilities costs

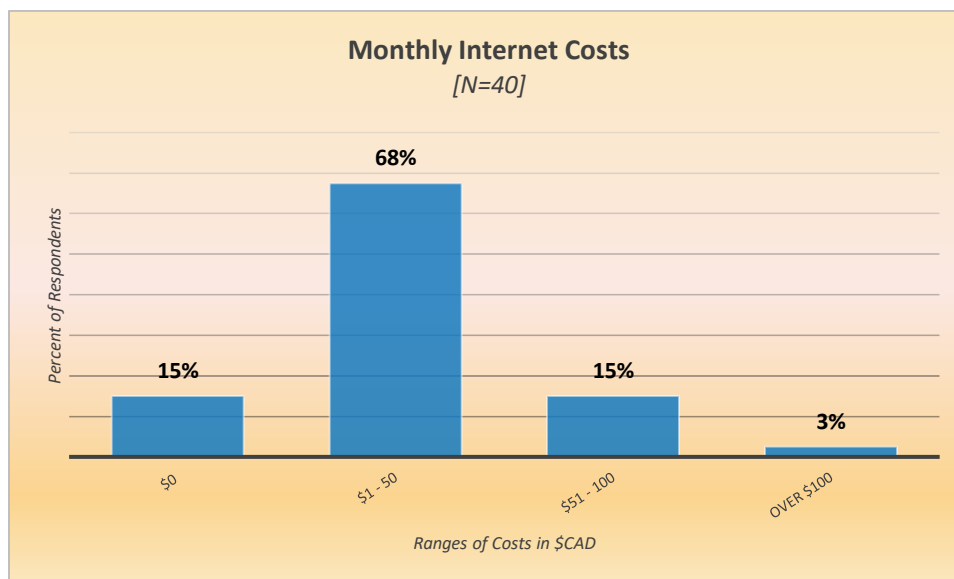


Figure 37. Monthly internet costs.

The majority of respondents indicated they spent less than \$50 per month on internet (see Figure 37). The average phone expense amongst respondents was \$52, a \$1 increase from 2019.

McGill's geography graduate students are still economizing when compared with other Canadians. The average monthly cost of a phone bill on a "Level 3" or "Standard" Canadian phone plan with mobile data, set calling minutes, and a fixed number of text messages, is \$70.70.⁵

⁵ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, "2017 Price Comparison Study of Telecommunications Services in Canada and Select Foreign Jurisdictions," October, 2017, [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/693.nsf/vwapj/Nordicity2017EN.pdf/\\$file/Nordicity2017EN.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/693.nsf/vwapj/Nordicity2017EN.pdf/$file/Nordicity2017EN.pdf)

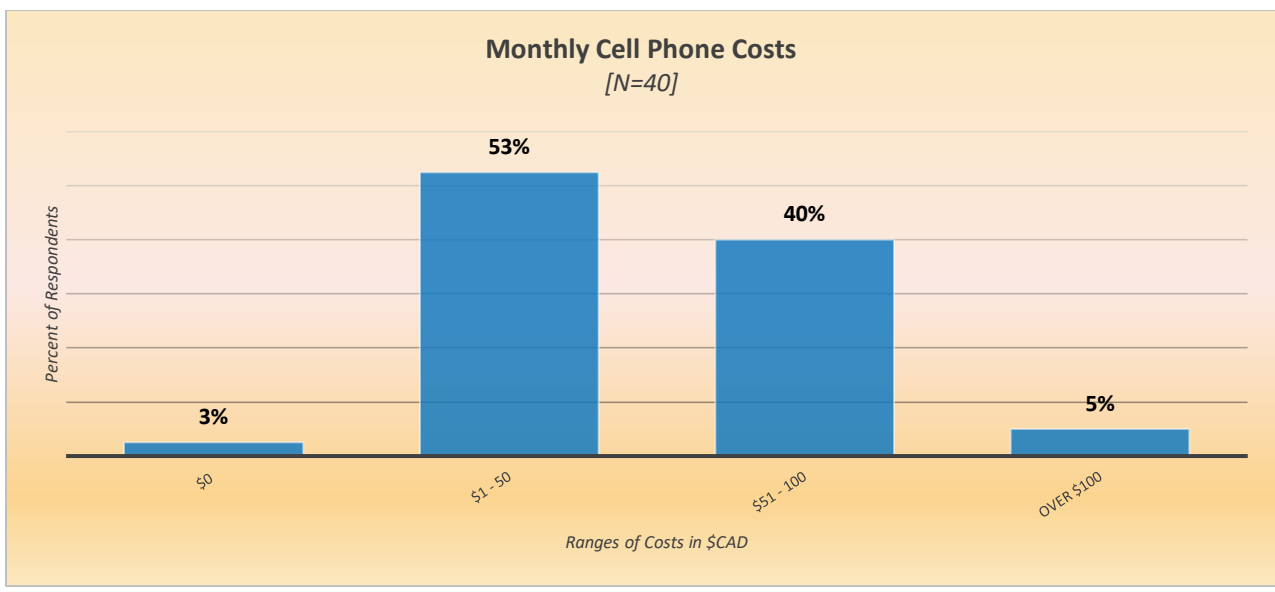


Figure 38. Monthly cell phone costs.

With regard to dependents, 9.5 percent of respondents indicated they had children, a spouse, or others who are dependent on them. This is an increase from the seven percent of respondents who answered affirmatively last year. It is important to take into consideration the unique circumstances individuals with dependents face, as their needs may be considerably different when compared with those responsible only for themselves.



5 – Opinions and Perspectives

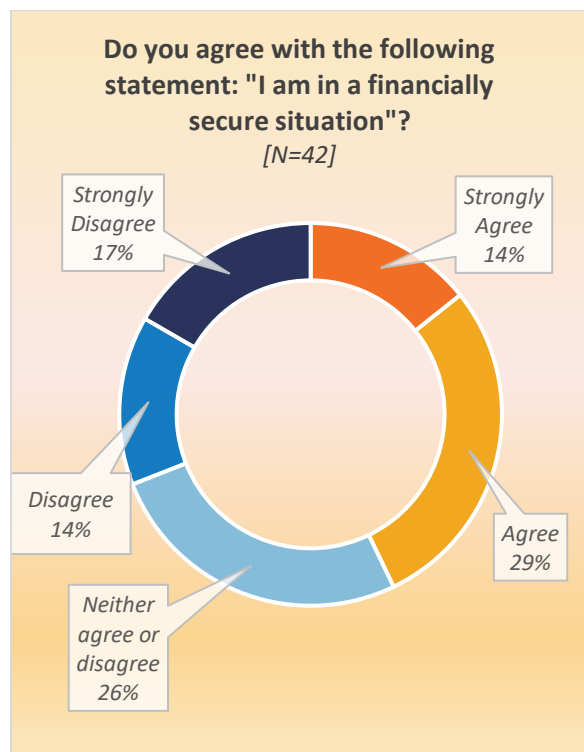
5.1 Financial Present and Future

The survey asked respondents a series of questions relating to their perception of their financial situation and provided some options for respondents to provide comments pertaining to their individual circumstances. The four main questions were agree/disagree statements with the standard possible responses:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The first question read:

“Do you agree with the following statement: ‘I am in a financially secure situation’? (Financially secure meaning *that* you are in a situation where you could realistically cover a major expense if it arose suddenly and can comfortably cover your regular expenses each month.)”



Forty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a level of financial security, compared to 31 percent who did not (see Figure 39). The number of respondents agreeing that they were in a financially secure position is up substantially from the 35 percent who answered similarly last year.

Represented in Figure 40, the second question read: “Do you agree with the following statement: ‘I am concerned for my financial well-being in the future because of my decision to pursue graduate studies’?” Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed, while only 22 percent disagreed with this statement.

Figure 39. Respondent perceptions of financial security.

Figure 41 represents the third question (Do you agree with the following statement: "I am presently worried about my financial situation"?), which indicates 45 percent of respondents answer in the affirmative while 36 percent disagreed. Notably, one respondent "strongly disagreed".

And the final question (Do you agree with the following statement: "I will have a manageable amount of debt incurred from graduate studies"?) elicited a disagreement from 38 percent of respondents and an agreement from 33 percent (see Figure 42). This is down from the 50 percent of respondents last year who agreed that their debt load would be manageable.

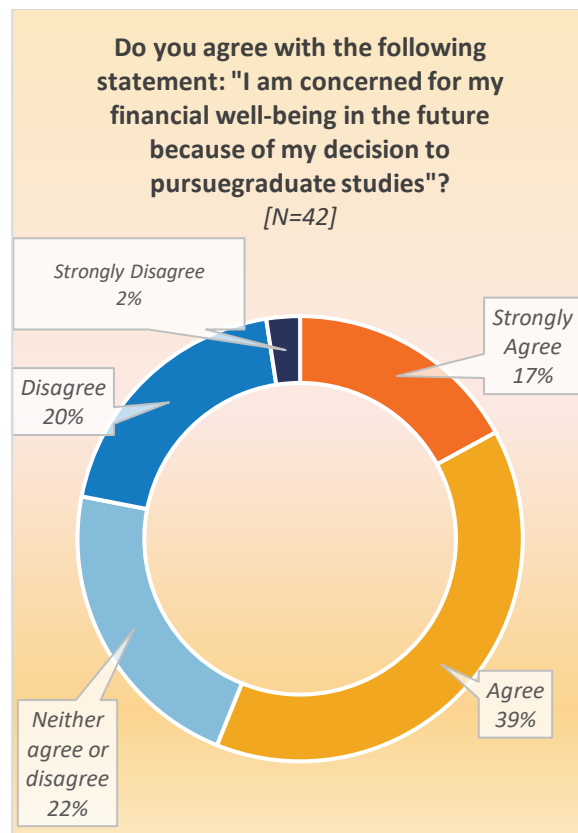


Figure 40. Opinions on future financial well-being.

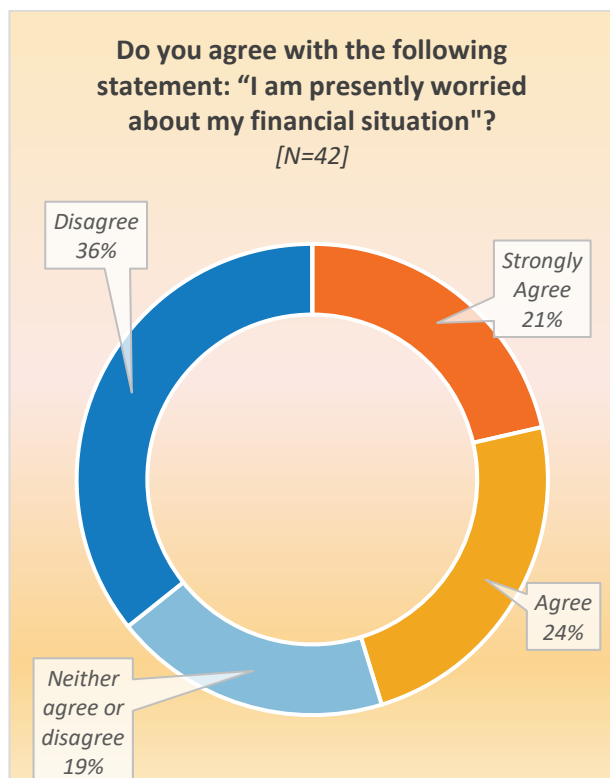


Figure 41. Opinions on present financial security.

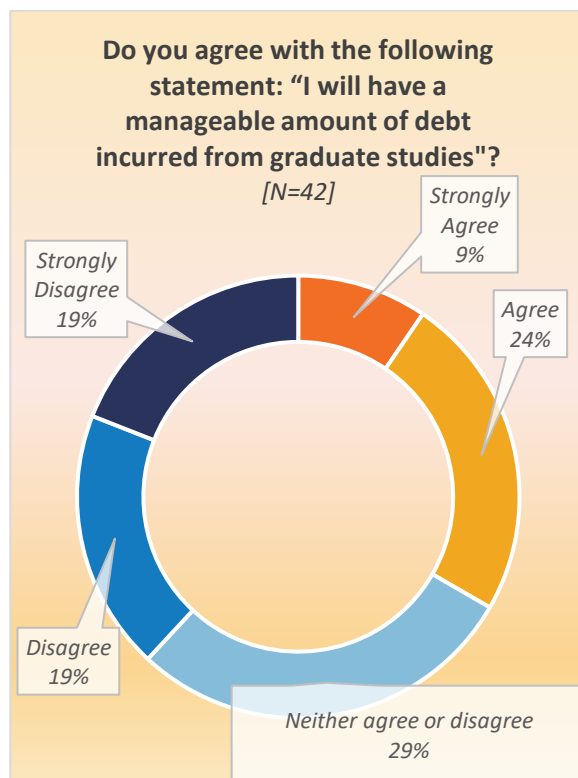


Figure 42. Opinions on future debt

We asked how respondents felt about discussing financial matters with their supervisors, providing them with a sliding-scale option (see Figure 43). The question read: “On a scale from 1 to 5, how comfortable do you feel discussing financial matters with your supervisor/supervisors?”

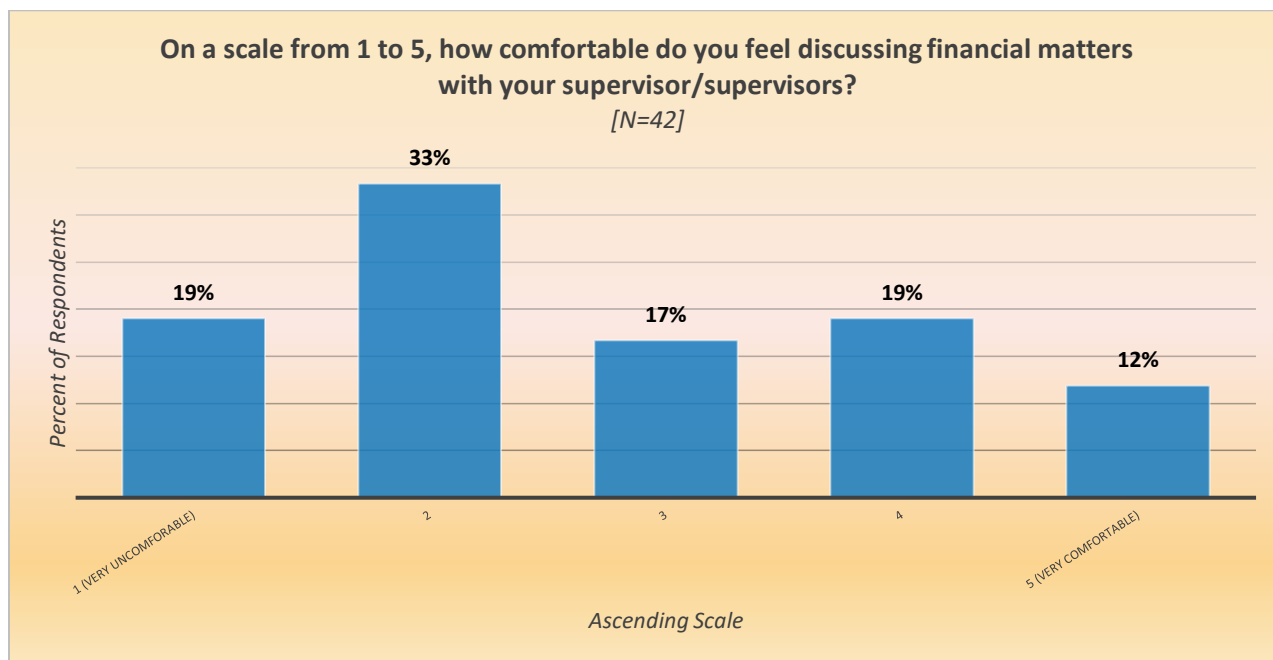


Figure 43. Comfort discussing financial matters with your supervisor.

A similar scale question (Figure 44) asked about financial improvement (On a scale from 1 to 5, do you believe you're in a better financial situation now than you were last year?).

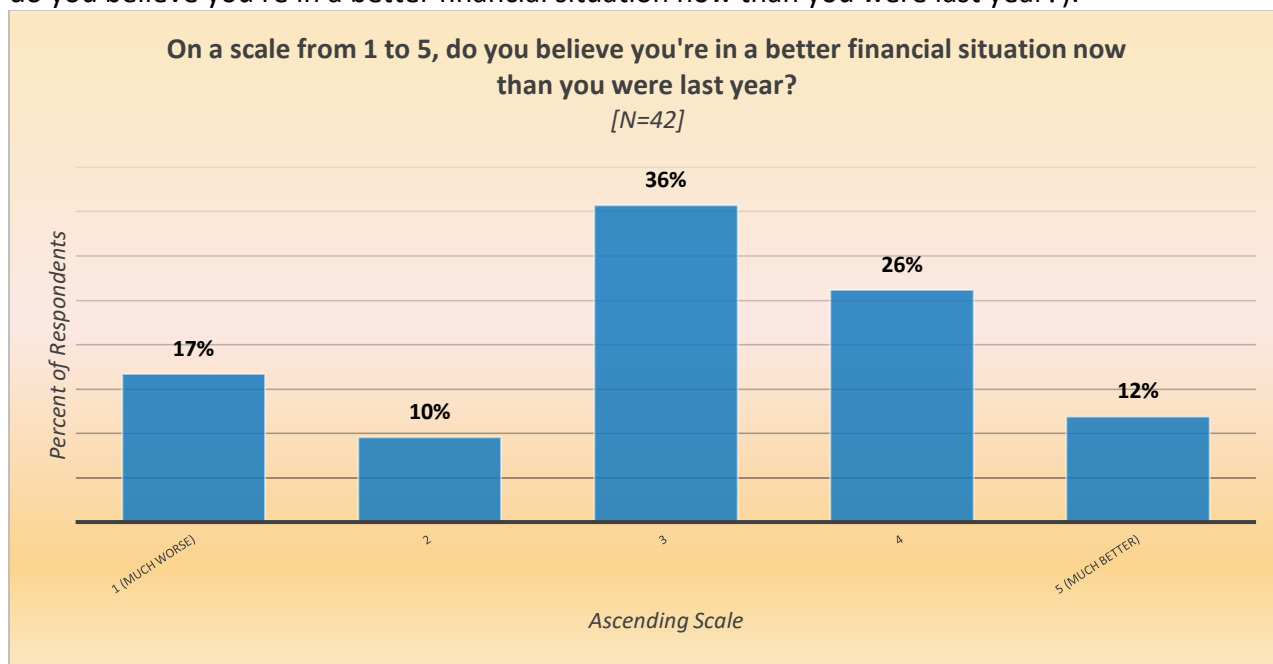


Figure 44. Are you financially better off now than last year?

5.2 Open-Ended Responses

Respondents were asked the following three open-response questions (see Questions 50 to 52 in Appendix A). Below are highlighted themes that arose in response to these questions, with bolded words being used frequently in answers.

Communication remains a difficulty for students with regards to conversations about funding with their supervisor and with funding schedules. Specifically, students noted that conversations about funding are difficult and, at times, vague. Related to communication, over 40 percent of respondents requested **transparency** for timelines of stipends and reimbursements, sources of funding, changes to supervisory funding packages, and available funds for research and conferences. Multiple respondents also indicated that funding was not timely, was inconsistent with their offer letter, and noted that funds from supervisors were cut without notice due to the granting of external awards. Students requested accountability measures for any supervisor or bureaucratic delays in funding, as students remain vulnerable without timely payments. Lack of communication and transparency around “Research assistantships” with their supervisors impacted students, as some indicated that the position was used as an “award” or sometimes without compensation if work is tangential to research, causing frustration. First year graduate students noted the difficulty in navigating the variety of sources of funding, conferences, and reimbursement system. Fostering healthy, transparent, and open dialogue about funding between graduate students and supervisors is essential to improving current and future funding situations.

Funding and tuition payments contributed to concern among students, as tuition is due at the beginning of the semester and employment or stipends are allocated throughout the semester (*as a reminder, in Minerva, students are able to apply for a deferral of tuition with a variety of reasons for delay*). Over 50 percent of students indicated that funding is typically not enough, especially in comparison to Québec minimum wage with tuition in mind. Respondents noted that contingency funding plans in **offer letters** should be described if students receive external awards rather than the current language of “may be subject to change.” Students also recommended including the cost of tuition in offer letters. Contributing to ongoing debates within the department and academia at large, students requested a **higher minimum stipend** and equal funding for all students. Students saw the benefit of raising the minimum funding for students to “at least minimum wage”, as one can see in the survey, not all students can pay living costs and tuition without having to tap into savings, credit, or loans. Respondents noted that the expected graduation dates are too soon given course demands, length of fieldwork, and various means of employment to pay for tuition and living expenses. Graduate students receiving the same amount of income remains a contentious debate, and one that many respondents think we should at least discuss. Across the board, graduate students believe in increasing the minimum stipend that supervisors allocate to students by carefully reviewing the living expenses detailed here and adjusting accordingly.

Other challenges participants noted are the difficult situations that they, their significant others, or their dependents may face regarding injuries, health issues, and unemployment. These difficulties cause significant stress, financial insecurity, and may lead to students considering the termination of their graduate degrees. Other concerns highlighted fieldwork being far costlier than anticipated. Compounded with regular stress and financial insecurity, some students are still burdened by debt and loans from their undergraduate studies, not to mention loans acquired during their graduate studies. Although sharing difficult and personal details with supervisors may be uncomfortable, fostering an open and transparent dialogue for the challenges that we may face is encouraged and essential to our well-being and success in our graduate degrees.

6 – Demographics

This year, we added a short optional demographic survey at the end of our funding questions to get a better idea as to what the make-up of our department is, one we hope to build upon in the 2020-2021 iteration of the funding survey, specifically for building data to understand department demographics in an effort to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the graduate student body. In this year's survey we asked about people's age, background, academic history, and future. With many of the questions, respondents were able to select/indicate more than one response, so not all graphs will total 100 percent.

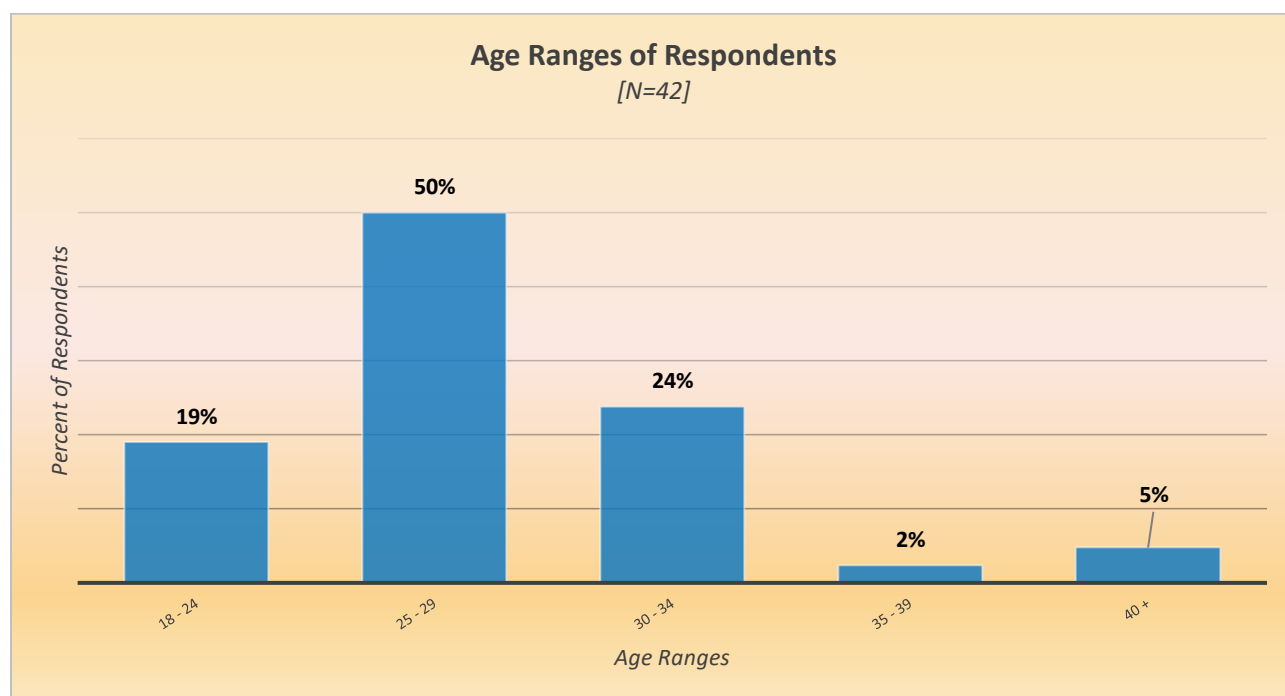


Figure 45. Age ranges of respondents

The gender identity of respondents:

27%
Male

71%
Female

2%
Non-Binary

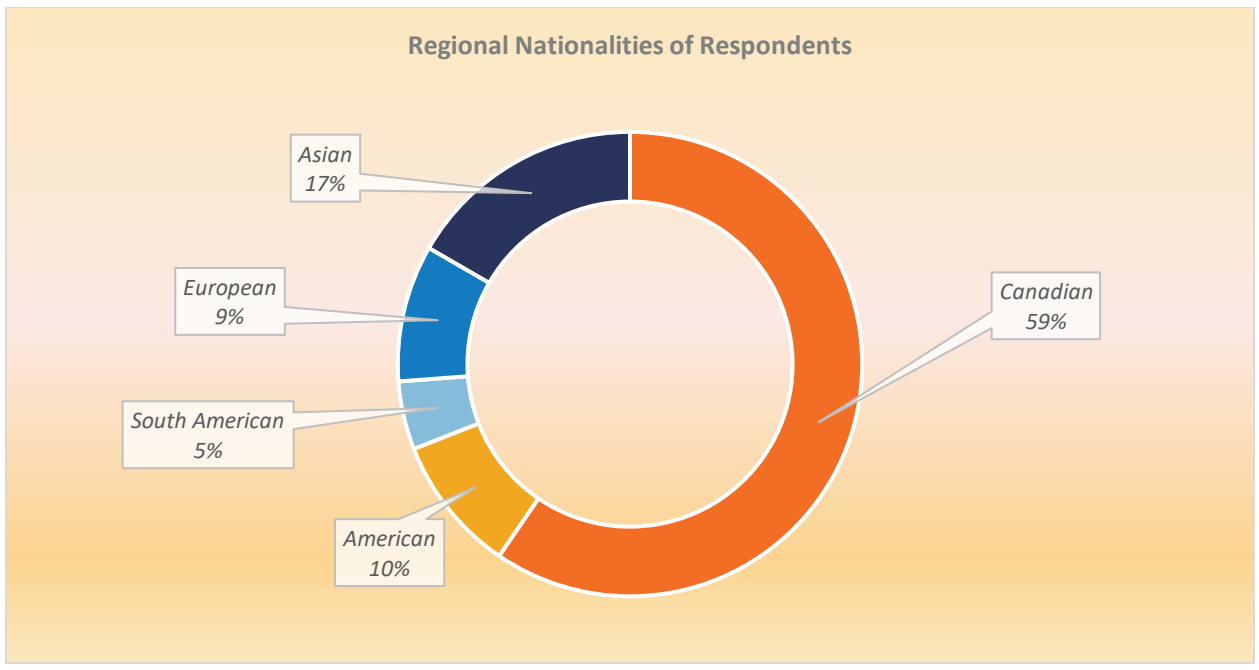


Figure 46. Nationalities of respondents.

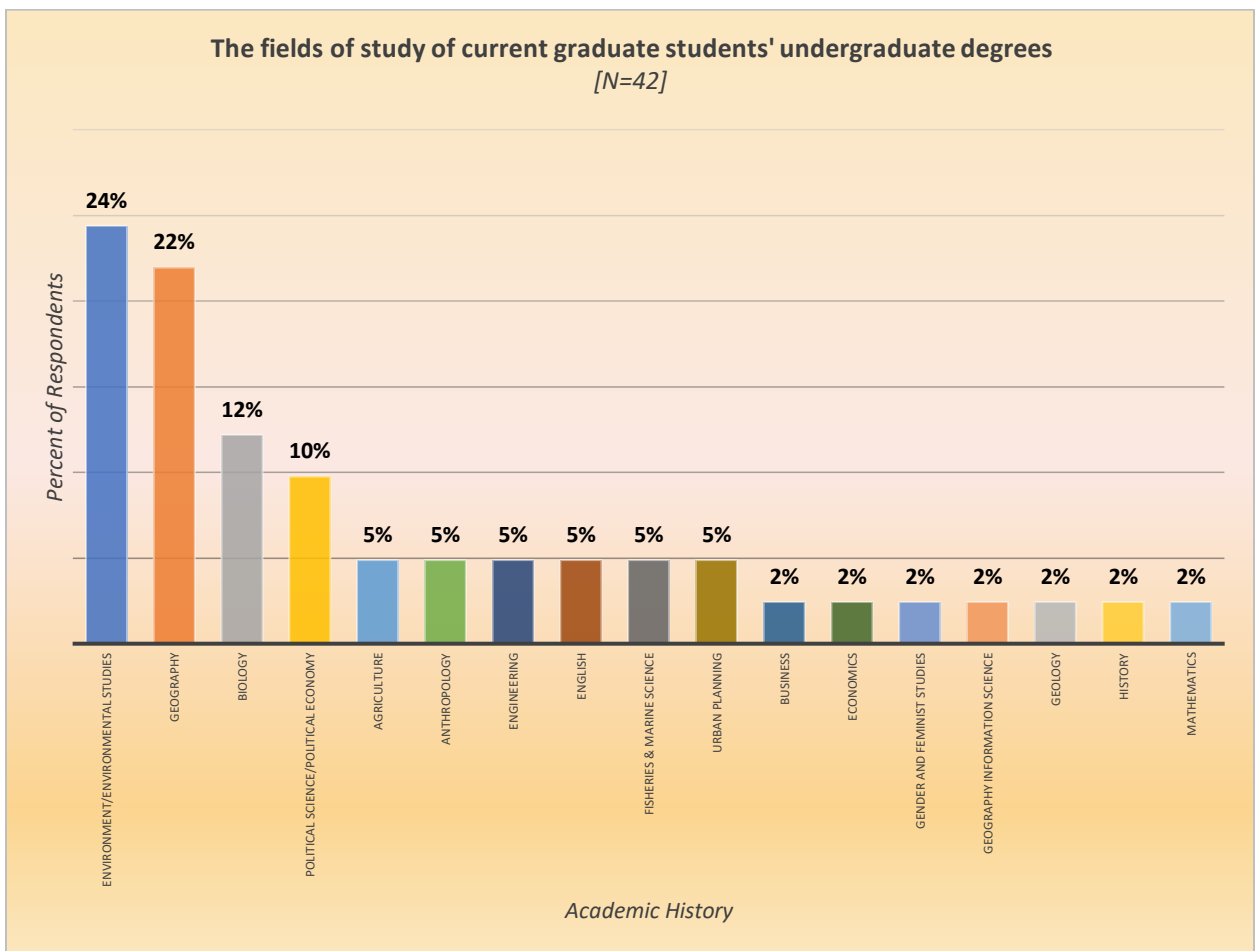


Figure 47. Previous fields of study for current graduate students.

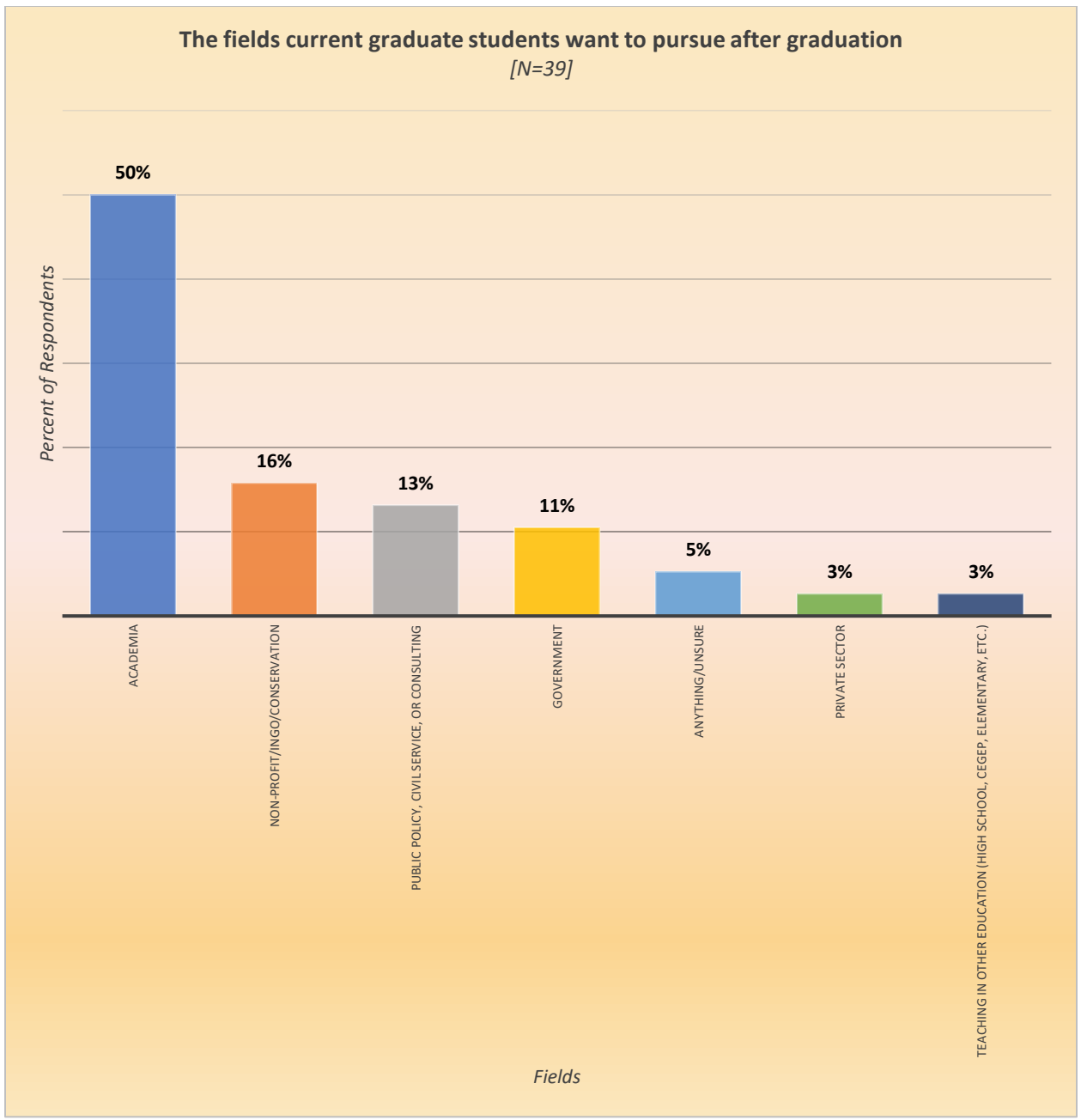


Figure 48. Future career paths for graduate students.



Appendix A

Survey as Presented

The 2020 Geography Graduate Society Funding and Finances Survey

Last year, your GGS Executive Team conducted a Funding and Finances survey to collect information on the financial state of Geography grads at McGill. What resulted was a report that was presented at a faculty retreat during the Winter 2019 term. This began an important and much-needed conversation about grad student funding that we hope will continue.

In order for us to be in the best possible position to lobby for you, we need to collect data over a period of time to show how costs and funding are change over time.

Your answers will give us a better idea as to the personal circumstances and financial challenges everyone faces and will help us in our efforts to advocate for you and your well-being. We hope that the data we collect will shed light on our living expenses and encourage supervisors to provide funding packages reflective of our needs.

The survey responses will be entirely confidential. The raw data will be held securely by the GGS Executive without any personally-identifying information associated with any set of responses.

You are free to stop the survey at any time. By completing and submitting this survey, you are consenting to take part in the study.

No individually-identifying characteristics will be released and only aggregated responses to the questions will be presented.

YOUR SUPERVISOR(S) AND THE DEPARTMENT WILL NOT HAVE ACCESS TO ANY INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES.

This survey is being run by grad students, for grad students, without any involvement from the faculty or administration.

At the beginning of the survey, we ask for an email address so that we can add your name to a draw to win a \$25 gift card to Thompson House. The email address will not be connected to any individual response.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact GGS Co-Presidents Chris Erl at christopher.erl@mail.mcgill.ca / in Burnside 309 or Patrick Slack at patrick.slack@mail.mcgill.ca / in Burnside 305A.

1. Please select the degree program you're completing:
 - a. MSc/MA
 - b. PhD
2. How many years have you been a graduate student in the Geography Department?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
 - f. 6+
3. Prior to arriving at McGill, where was your previous academic institution?
 - a. Canadian University in Quebec
 - b. Canadian University outside Quebec
 - c. Public University/College in the United States
 - d. Private University/College in the United States
 - e. University Elsewhere
 - f. Not previously a university student
 - g. Other (open-ended)
4. For statistical purposes, please indicate the name of your hometown, your state/province/territory, and the country you are originally from. (eg: Montreal, Quebec, Canada)
5. If you are an international student, did you receive a Differential Fee Waiver (DFW) as part of your offer to McGill? (DFWs are waivers authorized by the department exempting international students from the international tuition supplement.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. N/A
6. What are your tuition fees for the 2019/2020 academic year? This is your SEPTEMBER and JANUARY totals combined. Please type a dollar amount without punctuation.
7. How much money have you received/will you receive over the 2019/2020 academic year from your supervisor(s)? (•*Include* funding you receive from faculty members in the department who are not your supervisor. •*Exclude* any money you receive in the form of student loans, other grants/bursaries, employment, or any other source of income)
8. How much money have you received/will you receive over the 2019/2020 academic year from academic employment? (Academic employment funding refers to the money you receive from working as a Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Invigilator, Lab Supervisor, Library Employee, Course Instructor, etc.)
9. In the most recent past term (Fall 2019), approximately how many hours did you work in any of the following:
 - a. Teaching Assistant – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - b. Research Assistant – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - c. Invigilator – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - d. Lab Supervisor – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+

- e. Library/GIC employee – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - f. Course Instructor – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
10. In the current term (Winter 2020), approximately how many hours do you anticipate working in any of the following:
- a. Teaching Assistant – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - b. Research Assistant – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - c. Invigilator – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - d. Lab Supervisor – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - e. Library/GIC employee – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
 - f. Course Instructor – 0, 1-45, 46-90, 91-134, 135+
11. What is your bursary and/or scholarship funding for the 2019/2020 academic year? (Bursary and/or scholarship funding refers to any money you receive in the form of a fellowship, grant, or other award from organizations such as NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC, FRQNT, FRQS, and FRQSC.)
12. Do you anticipate applying for bursary and/or scholarship funding for the 2020/2021 academic year? (eg: NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC, FRQNT, FRQS, FRQSC, etc.)
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, if rejected in 2019/2020
 - c. No
 - d. Unsure
 - e. Decline
13. How much money did you receive in the form of the admissions Graduate Excellence Award, or 'top-up', as indicated in your Letter of Admission? (This can be found in Minerva under 'Financial Awards'.)
14. Do you receive any financial support from your partner(s), spouse, or parents?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline
15. Do you have any government-based student loans to help support your present graduate studies? (eg: Quebec's Loans and Bursaries Program, OSAP, StudentAid BC, etc.)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline
16. Do you have any other loans to help support your present graduate studies? (eg: Bank Loans, lines of credit, etc.)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline
17. Do you currently have employment outside McGill (eg: private sector, public sector, tutoring, 'gig' jobs through services like Uber, Fiverr, TaskRabbit, etc.)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline

18. With regard to your fieldwork and research, is it primarily:
 - a. Archival/online-based in any location
 - b. Fieldwork based in Canada
 - c. Fieldwork based in Asia
 - d. Fieldwork based in Africa
 - e. Fieldwork based anywhere else internationally
 - f. Other (open-ended)
19. What are your anticipated total overall fieldwork expenses
 - a. \$0
 - b. \$1 - \$5,000
 - c. \$5,001 - \$10,000
 - d. \$10,001 - \$15,000
 - e. \$15,001 - \$20,000
 - f. > \$20,000
20. What percentage of your fieldwork expenses did you pay for/do you expect to pay for out-of-pocket (reimbursed later)?
 - a. 0%
 - b. 1% - 25%
 - c. 25% - 50%
 - d. 51% - 75%
 - e. 76% - 100%
21. What percentage of your fieldwork expenses did you not get reimbursed for/do you not expect to be reimbursed for?
 - a. 0%
 - b. 1% - 25%
 - c. 25% - 50%
 - d. 51% - 75%
 - e. 76% - 100%
22. Indicate the total cost of all other research/academic/fieldwork related expenses you have incurred over the 2019/2020 Academic Year. (These could be funds for translation services, transcription, the purchasing of new laptops, hard drives, etc.)
 - a. \$0
 - b. \$1 – \$1,500
 - c. \$1,501 - \$3,000
 - d. \$3,001 - \$4,500
 - e. > \$4,500
23. Did you attend any of the following conferences in 2018/19 academic year? (Select all that apply and use the 'other' option to add other conferences)
 - a. Canadian Association of Geographers (Winnipeg)
 - b. American Association of Geographers (Washington DC)
 - c. Other (open-ended)
24. What were your total conference-related expenses in the 2018/2019 academic year?
 - a. \$0
 - b. \$1 – \$1,500

- c. \$1,501 - \$3,000
 - d. \$3,001 - \$4,500
 - e. > \$4,500
 - f. N/A
25. Do you plan on attending any of the following conferences in 2019/20 academic year?
(Select all that apply and use the 'other' option to add other conferences)
- a. Canadian Association of Geographers (Victoria)
 - b. American Association of Geographers (Denver)
 - c. Other (open-ended)
26. What are your total expected conference-related expenses in the 2019/2020 academic year?
- a. \$0
 - b. \$1 – \$1,500
 - c. \$1,501 - \$3,000
 - d. \$3,001 - \$4,500
 - e. > \$4,500
 - f. N/A
27. What was the total of your conference-related expenses paid for out-of-pocket (reimbursed later)?
- a. \$0
 - b. \$1 – \$1,500
 - c. \$1,501 - \$3,000
 - d. \$3,001 - \$4,500
 - e. > \$4,500
 - f. N/A
28. What was the total of your conference-related expenses that you WERE NOT reimbursed for?
- a. \$0
 - b. \$1 – \$1,500
 - c. \$1,501 - \$3,000
 - d. \$3,001 - \$4,500
 - e. > \$4,500
 - f. N/A
29. In what area of Montreal do you live?
- a. Plateau-Mont Royal (Milton-Place, Mile End, McGill 'ghetto', Plateau)
 - b. Ville-Marie (Gay Village, Sainte-Marie, Golden Square Mile)
 - c. Outremont
 - d. Sud-Ouest (Griffintown, St. Henri)
 - e. Côte-des-Neiges
 - f. Notre-Dame-de-Grâce
 - g. Rosemont – La-Petite-Patrie (Little Italy, Mile-Ex)
 - h. Villeray – St. Michel – Parc Ex
 - i. Mercier – Hochelaga-Maisonneuve
 - j. Verdun

- k. LaSalle
 - l. Mont-Royal
 - m. Saint-Laurent
 - n. Lachine
 - o. Another Montreal borough
 - p. An on-island suburb (Westmount, Côte Saint-Luc, Hampstead, etc.)
 - q. Off-Island
30. Please enter the FIRST THREE DIGITS of the postal code of your current residence (Postal Codes can be found using Canada Post's website:
<https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/postalcode/fpc.jsf>)
31. With regard to your present living situation, do you live:
- a. Alone
 - b. With 1 roommate
 - c. With 2 roommates
 - d. With 3 or more roommates
 - e. With a spouse/partner(s)
 - f. With family
 - g. Other (open-ended)
32. With regard to where you live in Montreal, why did you choose to live in that location?
- a. Rent (inexpensive or affordable)
 - b. Proximity to campus
 - c. Desirable location
 - d. Desirable amenities
 - e. Personal/general safety
 - f. Other (open-ended)
33. What is your monthly rent? (If you have roommates, please only indicate how much rent you pay individually.)
34. Have you been subjected to a rent increase at any point in the past two academic years? (2017/2018 or 2018/2019 academic year)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
35. If you lived in Montreal for the 2018/2019 academic year and moved for this (2019/2020) academic year, what were your motivations for doing so? If you did not move, what were your motivations for remaining in the same place?
36. If your rent does not include all utilities, what are your monthly accommodation-specific utilities expenses? Please only give us the total that you pay individually if your utilities costs are shared with roommates. (Accommodation-specific utilities expenses refers to any costs incurred *in addition to* your rent for the key essentials of electricity/hydro, water, gas, and/or heat.)
37. What is your average monthly internet expense?
38. What is your average monthly cell phone expense?
39. In the summer/spring, what is/are your primary mode(s) of transportation to McGill? (select all that apply)
- a. Car

- b. Bus
 - c. Metro
 - d. Bicycling
 - e. Walking
 - f. *Other (add own)*
40. In the winter/fall, what is/are your primary mode(s) of transportation to McGill? (select all that apply)
- a. Car
 - b. Bus
 - c. Metro
 - d. Bicycling
 - e. Walking
 - f. *Other (add own)*
41. How much do you spend in an average month on your primary mode(s) of transportation to McGill? (This can include parking passes, STM fares, the \$52 monthly STM student pass, etc.)
42. What are your average monthly food-related (specifically grocery) expenses?
43. Do you have any dependants? (Dependants referring to one's spouse or children who are fully or partially reliant on you)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline
44. Do you agree with the following statement: "I am in a financially secure situation,"? (Financially secure meaning that you are in a situation where you could realistically cover a major expense if it arose suddenly and can comfortably cover your regular expenses each month.)
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
45. Do you agree with the following statement: "I am concerned for my financial well-being in the future because of my decision to pursue graduate studies,"?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
46. Do you agree with the following statement: "I am presently worried about my financial situation"?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree

- e. Strongly disagree
47. Do you agree with the following statement: "I will have a manageable amount of debt incurred from graduate studies"?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
48. On a scale from 1 to 5, how comfortable do you feel discussing financial matters with your supervisor/supervisors?
- a. 1 – Not comfortable
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5 – Very comfortable
49. On a scale from 1 to 5, do you believe you're in a better financial situation now than you were last year?
- a. 1 – Not comfortable
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5 – Very comfortable
50. Have you experienced any challenges during your time at McGill relating to your financial situation?
51. Do you have any thoughts regarding how McGill and/or the Geography Department can improve the financial situation of graduate students?
52. Please provide any comments or opinions you have regarding graduate student funding in the Department of Geography at McGill.
53. Thank you for your participation! Please provide any other comments or opinions you have, or any comments regarding the survey itself.

DEMOGRAPHICS - THIS SECTION IS OPTIONAL. In this section, we're looking for personal characteristics to get a better idea of the demographic make-up of the grad student body in the Department of Geography.

54. What is your age
- a. 18 – 24
 - b. 25 – 29
 - c. 30 – 34
 - d. 35 – 39
 - e. 40+
 - f. Decline
55. What is your gender identity?
- a. Female
 - b. Male

- c. Non-Binary
 - d. Decline
56. What is your nationality?
57. What was the primary field of study of your undergraduate degree? (eg: Geography, Biology, Anthropology, etc.)
58. After graduation, which field would you most like to pursue?
- a. Academia
 - b. Law
 - c. Teaching in other education (High School, CEGEP, Elementary, etc.)
 - d. Public Policy, Civil Service, or Consulting
 - e. Non-Profit/INGO
 - f. Government
 - g. Private Sector
 - h. Other (open-ended)

