



ACCUTE
C/O Department of English
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University of New Brunswick
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April 21, 2020.

Dear Department Chairs, Heads, and Directors of Graduate Studies:

I am writing to you as the President of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) to express particular concern for graduate students who constitute a significant portion of membership and represent the future of our profession. **We would ask that you lobby for the waiving of summer tuition fees for graduate students at your institution given the precarious financial circumstances and unique challenges faced by graduate students during this pandemic. In cases where this is not possible, departments are looking at alternatives to offset the costs of tuition, for instance, through the creation of emergency research assistantships (recently undertaken by Western's Department of English). While not every department has the same resources or capacity, expressions of support for graduate students at this moment in time are critical.**

The lives of graduate students have changed dramatically in the last month. With universities now physically shuttered, graduate students have no access to facilities, office space, or physical libraries, which provide a critical touchstone during their studies. Access to supervisors is reduced and dependent upon the ability to connect online. At my own institution (the University of New Brunswick), doctoral comprehensive exams have been postponed until students can regain full access to library services, which are limited currently to digital holdings. Some of these same students have, as teaching assistants and instructors, had to move online in record time to deliver courses through alternative methods, with varied levels of support. The result is that the expectation of graduate students to move through their programs in a timely fashion and undertake the various professional and pragmatic steps to do so (whether presenting a paper at a conference or holding down a part-time job to supplement one's income) has been fundamentally challenged. Many graduate students are juggling family obligations but lack steady employment at a time when their capacity to work from home may be deeply compromised by the necessity of providing full-time childcare or looking after sick family members. The pandemic has heightened the need for mental health supports, yet with campuses physically closed, graduate students feel especially isolated.

Most importantly, Covid-19 has heightened the financial precarity faced by graduate students. With Covid-19 the possibility of summer jobs has evaporated, yet graduate students to date do not qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. Many institutions are cutting intersession and summer session courses, the courses that would have provided graduate students with essential income. In the case of international students, they have no access to student loans. For domestic students, taking a leave of absence could trigger the obligation to repay loans. With the deadline for summer tuition only weeks away, they now face the difficult decision of whether to pay rent and feed their families or pay tuition, a choice that no one should have to make. Please share this letter with the appropriate decision-makers at your institution and do reach out if you need further information regarding this request or you would like to detail specific challenges faced by graduate students in your unit.

Take care,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Andrews".

Jennifer Andrews, Professor and President of ACCUTE (2018-2020)