

National survey sheds light on the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on graduate students across Canada

TORONTO - The Toronto Science Policy Network (TSPN), a student-run science policy group, has released its [COVID-19 Graduate Student Survey report](#). Based on 1,431 responses between April 22nd and May 31st, 2020, the report highlights the **early impacts of COVID-19 on graduate students across Canada**, and lays out recommendations for key decision-makers, including universities and various levels of government.

While a number of surveys have been launched to understand the effects of COVID-19 on post-secondary students, none have focused on the specific realities faced by graduate students.

“Graduate students are the life force of discovery and innovation, providing the critical ideas, talent, and labour necessary for the majority of research being conducted in Canada,” says Farah Qaiser, a TSPN representative who recently defended her Master of Science degree virtually. “As a result of COVID-19, many graduate students remain trapped in a limbo, facing an uncertain future.”

This survey found that COVID-19 impacted:

- **Research:** Around three-quarters of graduate students reported that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their ability to conduct research due to institutional closures.
- **Health and wellness:** 26% of graduate students are now considering taking a long term leave of absence, compared to pre-COVID-19 (10%). Graduate students increasingly reported experiencing anxiety, depression, feelings of helplessness, loneliness, or being overwhelmed compared to before COVID-19.
- **International students:** Over half of international students are worried about completing their degree requirements before the expiration of their study permit.
- **Degree completion:** Of those planning to complete degree requirements by August 2020 (n=367), half report being unable to, or being uncertain about their ability to graduate as a result of COVID-19.

While these impacts are troubling, the report also outlines recommendations towards better supporting graduate students across Canada, including calls to reduce the financial burden faced by graduate students, introduce flexibility into degree completion times, and to improve health and wellness systems available at institutions.

“Our report is a snapshot of what graduate students were experiencing in the early stages of the lockdown,” says Sivani Baskaran, a TSPN representative, and a third-year PhD student in chemistry at the University of Toronto. “We have identified opportunities for action for decision makers in institutions and governments to ensure that the next generation of researchers and budding professionals can recover, and thrive after the pandemic.”

The report and its associated materials are available at: toscipolicynet.ca/covid19-report/. For more information contact to.scipolicynet@gmail.com.

The Toronto Science Policy Network is a student-run science policy group based at the University of Toronto, which provides a platform for students (graduate & undergraduate) and post-doctoral researchers to learn more about and engage in science policy. This project was made possible thanks to funding from the University of Toronto's [COVID-19 Student Engagement Award](#).

