



## CHA Committee on the Future of the History PhD in Canada Report<sup>1</sup>

Last year, the CHA/SHC decided to establish a task force on the future of the History PhD in Canada. The task force has seven members: Sam Hossack (Graduate Student, University of Waterloo); Will Langford (Assistant Professor, Dalhousie University); Tina Loo (Faculty, UBC); Christine O'Bonsawin (Faculty, Victoria); Martin Pâquet (Faculty, Laval) and John Walsh (Faculty, Carleton University). It is chaired by Catherine Carstairs (Faculty, University of Guelph).

We hope that this report provides valuable information for people thinking about doing a PhD and for PhD students in progress. They should know as much as possible about the hiring prospects for PhD students, the requirements of programs across the country including the often unwritten expectations of PhD work, the funding possibilities, the average time to completion for a PhD program, and the shifting trends and priorities in the discipline.<sup>2</sup>

We also hope that it provides a valuable resource for faculty training PhD students. They should also be aware of the state of the job market, the employment possibilities for PhD graduates outside of academia, the lack of funding for PhD students, and the challenges and expectations of diverse and marginalized PhD students. Supervisors should have hard conversations with prospective students about why they are undertaking a PhD and what they hope to get out of it. Departments should think carefully about whether they are incentivizing faculty to take PhD students and if so, why? This might depend a lot on local circumstances, but what purpose is the PhD program in their department serving? For example, in the national capital region, lots of PhD graduates find employment in government. Indigenous students may enter PhD programs to acquire research skills and expertise to support the broader objectives of their communities and/or nations. Are there ways that the PhD program in those institutions can better prepare students for jobs in these

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<sup>1</sup> The committee wants to thank Danielle Mahon, Carleton University, for her work on this report including digging up data on scholarships, providing the Statistics Canada information and fact-checking Appendix 3. We'd also like to thank our committee member Will Langford who went above and beyond in his research, putting together the information for Appendix 3, creating the database of dissertations and the database of recent job hirings.

<sup>2</sup> We suggest that graduate students also read the very helpful CHA guidebook on doing a PhD in history. Carly Ciufo, Jenny Ellison and Andrew Johnston, *Employing History: A Guide to Graduate School and Navigating the Job Market* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association and the American Historical Association, 2020) <https://cha-shc.ca/uploads/5fa2c7334b719.pdf>

areas? At the same time, we recognize that at the core of the PhD is to produce original historical research. We need to provide the academic training that will allow students to do this research.

We have provided a number of suggestions to departments for how they might change their programs to reflect the changing ways that history is being written and communicated and for whom. Historians are trying to reach a broader audience than they have in the past and they are employing different methodologies including Indigenous methodologies. This requires a different kind of training and more flexible pathways to accommodate different kinds of knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization. Our PhD graduates are working for Indigenous communities, in museums, libraries, private research companies and teaching and learning centres. Many of the existing requirements were put in place under the assumption that we were training future history professors. If this is not the case, or is only the case for a small minority of students, do these requirements still make sense? And yet at the same time, many of the skills learned in a PhD program are valuable in the world outside of academia: historians are skilled communicators/teachers in both written and oral forms, they can organize and interpret large data sets and they are creative problem solvers.

Front of mind as we began this project was the dismal state of the academic job market, the paucity of funding available to PhD students, the length of time that it was taking to complete a PhD, the possibility of preparing students for jobs outside of academia and the degree to which our disciplinary practices and processes are rooted in colonial practices and class hierarchies. We are aware that the history departments are often incentivized by the universities and by provinces to increase the size of their PhD programs, that the training of PhD students is often prioritized as a step towards tenure and promotion and that faculty are often invested in prestige that often comes with training PhD students. Graduate students are also important to departments in terms of the teaching labour they provide. But we need to ensure that we are not taking graduate students because of these structural incentives – instead, we need to think first about what is best for the students who are enrolling in graduate programs. We also need to think carefully about our disciplinary practices and processes that have excluded certain people from the academy and still serve to make history departments less welcoming than they should be to diverse and marginalized scholars, including, but not limited to, Indigenous scholars, Black scholars, scholars of colour, disabled scholars, and first-generation scholars.

Given the changes in the way history is being communicated, the need to diversify the profession, and the dismal job market, the history PhD will have to be rethought in creative ways. This report contains a variety of suggestions that will encourage history departments to rethink the PhD – this may also involve making changes to undergraduate education, tenure and promotion guidelines, and our own ways of doing history. We are also conscious of growing interdisciplinarity, trans-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity in our field and we would like to encourage history departments to value what people trained other disciplines might bring to PhD programs, both as PhD students and as PhD supervisors. We also encourage history departments to reach out to other

parts of the university for support as they revise their programs. This includes other academic units, which teach valuable tools in digital humanities, Indigenous methodologies, programming and languages but also to career counselling services, co-op offices, libraries and learning centres, which also have much to add to PhD education.

Students told us that they need more support: more financial support, more guidance and more attention to their well-being, all of which will allow them to undertake the research that they came to a PhD program to do. There is a serious mental health crisis in graduate education. The *Degrees of Success* report, published by the Canadian Council of Academies in 2021 pointed out that graduate students were six times more likely than the general population to experience depression and anxiety. Students in the later stages of their program are even more likely to experience moderate to severe symptoms of depression and anxiety.<sup>3</sup> The mental health crisis in graduate education has many causes, including the isolation involved in undertaking a PhD in the humanities, the funding crisis and the lack of secure employment. How do we make our programs better serve our students? Studying history should be a joyful exercise – we all love the excitement of uncovering new material and understanding the past in new ways, but the material realities of doing a PhD right now has made it far more difficult for students to enjoy the intellectual pursuit of doing a PhD.

## Research

The CHA/SHC Task Force carried out a number of different research projects. The Task Force focused on programs that award a Doctor of Philosophy degree in History. There are 24 PhD programs in History in Canada, involving 26 History departments. Some historians are also trained in interdisciplinary programs – including Indigenous studies, anthropology, education, sex and gender studies etc. The vast range of these programs made it impossible for us to include them in our analysis, but it is important to note that all scholarship, including historical scholarship, is becoming more interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary, thus, broadening the questions we are asking as historians and provides us with important tools for training a new generation of historians.

The History PhD programs considered are located in the institutions listed in the below table, arranged by province.

History PhD Programs in Canada	
<i>Alberta</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Alberta</li> <li>• University of Calgary</li> </ul>
<i>British Columbia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simon Fraser University</li> <li>• University of British Columbia</li> <li>• University of Victoria</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Council of the Academies, *Degrees of Success* (Ottawa: Canadian Council of the Academies, 2021), 40-41.

*Manitoba*

- University of Manitoba

*Ontario*

- Carleton University
- University of Guelph (Tri-University Program)
- McMaster University
- Queen's University
- University of Ottawa
- University of Toronto
- Waterloo University (Tri-University Program)
- Western University
- Wilfrid Laurier University (Tri-University Program)
- York University

*New Brunswick*

- University of New Brunswick

*Newfoundland and Labrador*

- Memorial University of Newfoundland

*Nova Scotia*

- Dalhousie University

*Quebec*

- McGill University
- Concordia University
- Université de Montréal
- Université du Québec à Montréal
- Université de Sherbrooke
- Université Laval

*Saskatchewan*

- University of Saskatchewan

In Appendix 3, you can find the requirements of all of these programs. There are some substantial differences. We also conducted a survey of history departments across the country, asking them about the size of their programs, students' fields of study, students' nationality, their length of time to completion, the number of students withdrawing, the number of students obtaining postdoctoral fellowships and where students are finding employment. Unfortunately, not everyone was able to complete this survey and as a result, we are missing data from some of the larger programs. What the data did show is that there are many very small programs across the country – of the 14 departments who completed our survey (including two from the Tri-University), 12 of them admitted fewer than 20 students in total over the past five years. There are some disadvantages of these programs for students: they often lack a cohort of fellow students to support their learning and their mental health through the PhD program. Our data on the job market suggests that

students from these smaller programs may be less likely to find tenured academic employment. But this is not a substantive difference, since very few PhD graduates from history departments in Canada are finding jobs, regardless of where they completed their PhD. Not everyone can or should travel to do a PhD, and if students are doing community-based research projects, having longstanding relationships can be enormously valuable or even indispensable. University of Victoria has an Indigenous Recruitment Support Fund that prioritizes hiring Indigenous graduates from UVic PhD programs and this has resulted in many people being hired directly out of PhD programs into faculty jobs at UVic.<sup>4</sup> These scholars have longstanding community relationships that make them particularly valuable additions to the University community. Alternatively, some schools have substantive archival holdings and faculty expertise in particular areas. In short, small PhD programs can provide opportunities for students who cannot travel to do a PhD, or where travel is not desirable due to their belonging to or relationships with local communities, including many people with caregiving responsibilities. These programs can also play an important role in serving local communities. But smaller programs need to think carefully about the niche they are serving and why.

**RECOMMENDATION: We urge small programs to think carefully about the value their PhD program is providing for students, for the local community or to adding to the literature in particular fields of study. Large programs also need to consider what their students are likely to do after they finish their PhDs.**

The vast majority of students at in History PhD programs that reported numbers to us are Canadian citizens or permanent residents, although two programs admitted large numbers of international students. Of departments that were able to provide information about the outcomes of their PhD students, very few of them were in tenure track jobs. Many reported that they had PhD graduates working in government and museums, and many were working at university writing centres or in professional and managerial positions elsewhere in the university sector.<sup>5</sup> Large numbers were working as sessional instructors or in contractually limited appointments. Overall, departments were not keeping good track of their PhD students after they graduated. Another picture of PhD outcomes can be found in Appendix 2.

We circulated a survey in French and English through the CHA and the IHAF. We had 40 French-language responses and 109 English-language responses. We reference this survey frequently in the report.

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<sup>4</sup> Details of this available in Appendix K of this document:

<https://www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/assets/docs/Collective%20Agreement.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The Conference Board of Canada found that only 18.6% of employed PhDs in Canada became full-time professors. But 40% were employed in the post-secondary sector – they worked as sessional instructors, postdoctoral fellows, and support staff. Conference Board of Canada, *Inside and Outside of the Academy: Preparing PhDs for Careers* (Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 2015), iii.

We drew data from Statistics Canada on the profile of humanities PhDs across the country. We conducted an extensive study of completed PhD dissertations using the on-line thesis portals. We also examined the websites of all Canadian universities that offer a PhD in history to determine hiring patterns over the past six years.

We also conducted focus groups with graduate program directors across the country by region. There was considerable enthusiasm for these sessions which were well attended. We heard a lot at these meetings about the problems faced by students who were beyond their funding period, about the resistance of some faculty to change and sometimes about the need for better mentorship practices on the part of supervisors.

Finally, we looked at where the tenure and tenure-track faculty working at the Canadian institutions whose doctoral programs we surveyed obtained their PhDs. We used the data provided by the American Historical Association of History Departments and Organizations. We are aware that not every department submits its information to the directory and that not every department updates its information regularly, but this provides a good snapshot of how history programs across the country are currently staffed.

**RECOMMENDATION: That the CHA/SHC continue to host annual or bi-annual meetings of graduate program directors, similar to what it does for department Chairs. We recommend that these meetings be conducted virtually to ensure attendance from grad directors who do not normally attend the CHA/SHC Annual Meeting.**

**RECOMMENDATION: We suggest that the CHA/SHC keep better track of the number of students being admitted to and graduating from PhD programs and their employment outcomes. As well, the CHA/SHC might keep track of academic jobs in history, perhaps issuing a regular jobs report as the American Historical Association does.**

We also met with the CHA Graduate Students' Committee and worked with it to discuss how current graduate students view the process of obtaining a PhD in history at Canadian universities. The major take-away from these discussions was a recognition by students that there are career options for graduates outside of academia, but that their programs do not prepare them for these options or provide adequate information on what these options are. Graduate students suggested that the CHA could develop and share resources on careers outside academia. We have included suggestions in the report for how departments, supervisors, and graduate students themselves can take advantage of resources elsewhere on campus to better prepare students for non-academic careers.

We hosted three webinars on career options for PhD students featuring History PhD graduates who were working in museums, libraries, digital marketing, consulting and government with tips and

tricks for how to get into these fields and how work in these areas differed from academia. We heard that many History PhD graduates are delighted with their careers outside of academia – some mentioned better work/life balance; many said that they had challenging assignments that made use of the skills that they learned during their PhDs and they enjoyed working collaboratively with other smart people. We heard from graduate students that they would like to see more webinars like this that focused on professional development for graduate students including things like grant-writing and we were very pleased to see that the CHA/SHC is doing some of this in 2022-3. This may be especially important for students in the many small programs across the country where there is less capacity to provide professional development workshops and fewer opportunities to learn from peers.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the CHA/SHC continue to provide virtual professional development webinars for PhD students and recent graduates.

As part of this process, we developed model learning outcomes for the history PhD, relying on the categories used by both Ontario and Alberta as their PhD program learning outcomes. We felt that learning outcomes would help departments think through what should be learned from a PhD program, the degree to which the existing requirements actually evaluate whether this learning has happened. These learning outcomes can be found in Appendix 1.

**RECOMMENDATION:** We urge departments to adopt PhD learning outcomes. We hope that they might use the outcomes provided below to shape and perhaps to streamline their programs. Departments should ensure that program requirements reflect the learning outcomes established by their department.

Anecdotally, we know that our programs disproportionately attract students from more privileged backgrounds. A recent report in *Nature Human Behavior* found that nearly a quarter of tenure track faculty in the US have a parent with a PhD. The lead author concluded “the professoriate is, and has remained accessible disproportionately to the socioeconomically privileged, which is likely to deeply shape their scholarship and their reproduction.”<sup>6</sup> Census Canada data from 2016 shows that only 2% of people with history PhDs in Canada identify as Aboriginal or Metis.<sup>7</sup> Census Canada data from 2016 shows that only 11% of people with PhDs in History identify as being a visible minority.<sup>8</sup> While this reflects who has graduated from PhD programs in the past, we do not know

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<sup>6</sup> Colleen Flaherty, « 22% of Tenure-Track Professors Have a Parent with a PhD, » Inside Higher Ed 31 August 2022, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2022/08/31/22-tenure-track-professors-have-parent-phd>

<sup>7</sup> Data source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-011-X2011037. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=2&LANG=E&A=R&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=01&GL=-1&GID=1118296&GK=1&GRP=1&O=D&PID=107560&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=94&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=&D1=7&D2=17&D3=0&D4=0&D5=2&D6=0>

<sup>8</sup> Data source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016274. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp->

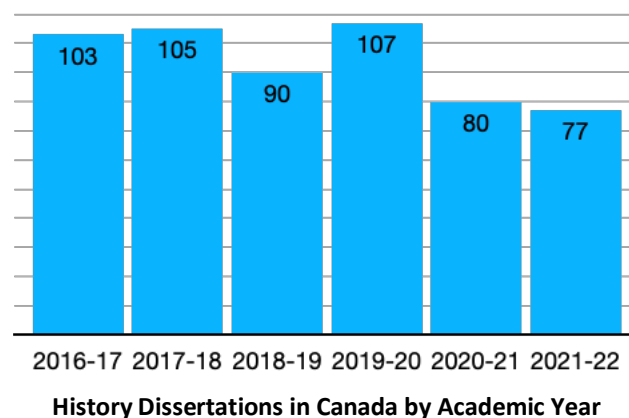
if our programs have gotten better at reflecting the make-up of Canadian society, and have no idea how many of our students are the first in their families to attend university, how many of them come from working-class backgrounds and how many of them identify as Black, Indigenous, or racialized people.

**RECOMMENDATION:** We urge the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada to undertake a survey of existing graduate students in the SSHRC-funded disciplines to determine whether students in these fields reflect the diversity of the Canadian population.

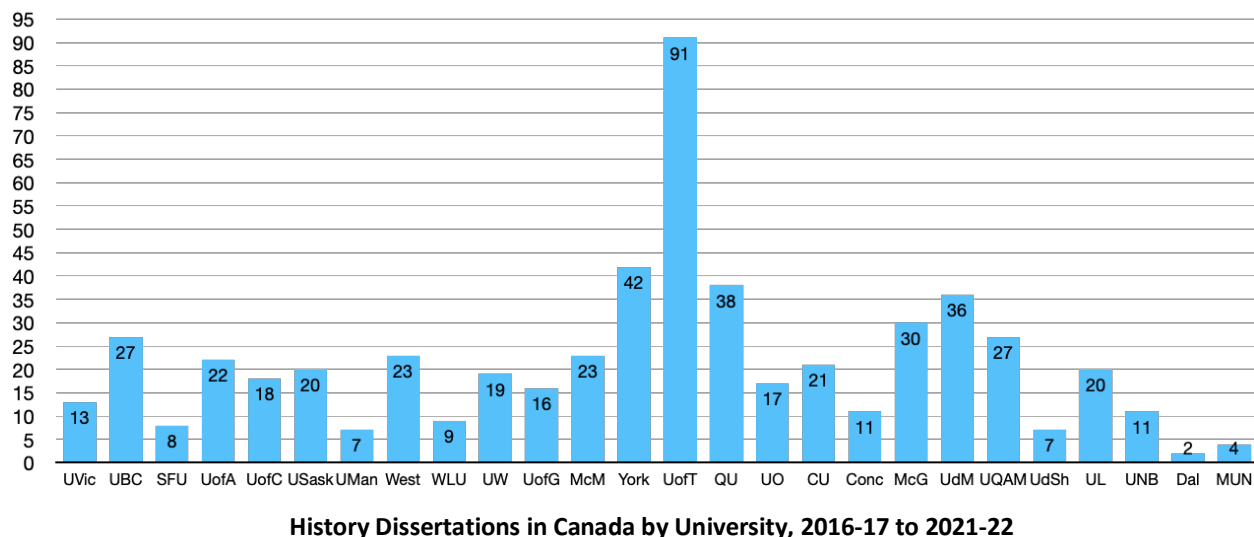
## The Landscape

Will Langford carried out a study of completed dissertations from September 2016 to the end of August 2022, using online thesis repositories. 562 dissertations were completed in this time period. By this measure, the University of Toronto has the largest PhD program in Canada, with more than double the number of graduating students than any other single program. Other large programs include: York, Queen's, Université de Montreal and the Tri-University (Waterloo, Guelph and Laurier)

with between 30-44 graduates each. UBC, Western, McMaster, McGill and UQAM each had 22-27 graduates, while Carleton University, Université Laval, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Saskatchewan, University of Ottawa, and UVIC had between 13-21 graduates. The rest had fewer than 11 graduates.



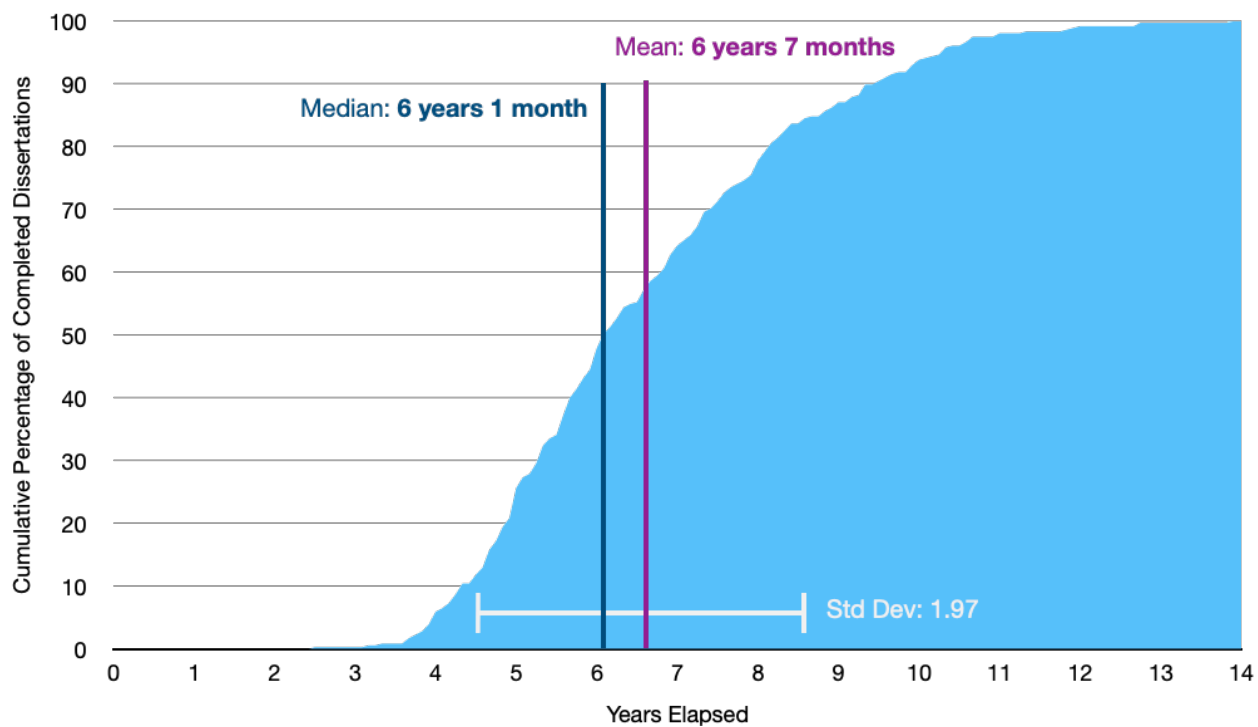




When time to completion could be determined from LinkedIn resumés and other sources (63.2% of the dissertations), the median completion time was 6 years and one month and the mean was 6 years and 7 months. Only 10% of students had completed by the end of 4.25 years. This is in keeping with other data – drawing on Statistics Canada data in 2014, Vincent Larivière found that the average time to completion for humanities PhDs was just under 7 years.<sup>9</sup> According to data we obtained from the departments themselves, the time to completion varies considerably. Many departments, including many of the larger programs (UBC, University of Alberta, University of Toronto) are well over 7 years. Some of the programs that have more streamlined comprehensive exam processes, including most dramatically, McMaster, which has eliminated comprehensive exams and clocks in at an average time-to-completion of 5.25 years, have shorter times to completion. That said, shorter completion times might be hindering student success in the academic job market. We could only locate one student from McMaster who finished between 2016-17 and 2021-22 who obtained a tenure track job, although McMaster’s success rate is not that different from other institutions. Thus while a faster time-to-completion means students incur less debt, it does not necessarily mean they are better placed to get a tenure-track job.

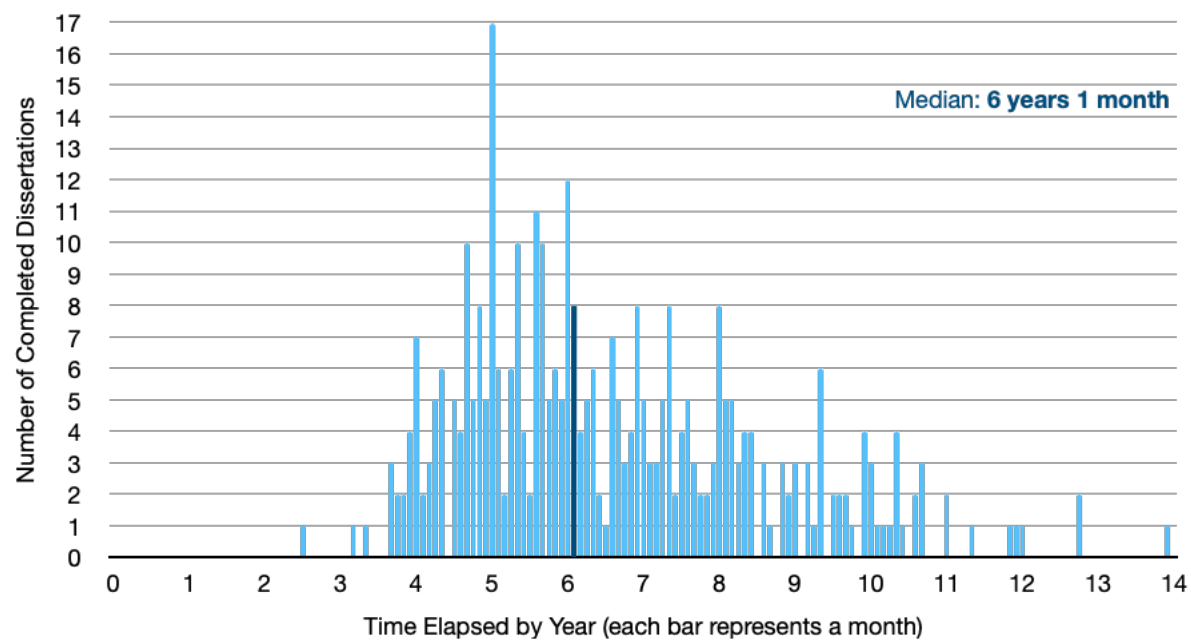
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<sup>9</sup> Vincent Larivière, *Les facteurs de réussite d'un doctorat (et quelques commentaires sur l'après doctorat!)*, Université du Québec à Montréal, Observatoire des sciences et des technologies Centre interuniversitaire de recherche sur la science et la technologie, *Journée de la relève en recherche*, 24 septembre 2014. [https://www.acfas.ca/les-sciences-en-video?gclid=Cj0KCQjw-fmZBhDtARIsAH6H8qhsfHQFErYLHPnpNg\\_5jSmnE09\\_CmK-fI04SNgQdnQd\\_N8kg7lgYFEaAiABEALw\\_wcB](https://www.acfas.ca/les-sciences-en-video?gclid=Cj0KCQjw-fmZBhDtARIsAH6H8qhsfHQFErYLHPnpNg_5jSmnE09_CmK-fI04SNgQdnQd_N8kg7lgYFEaAiABEALw_wcB)

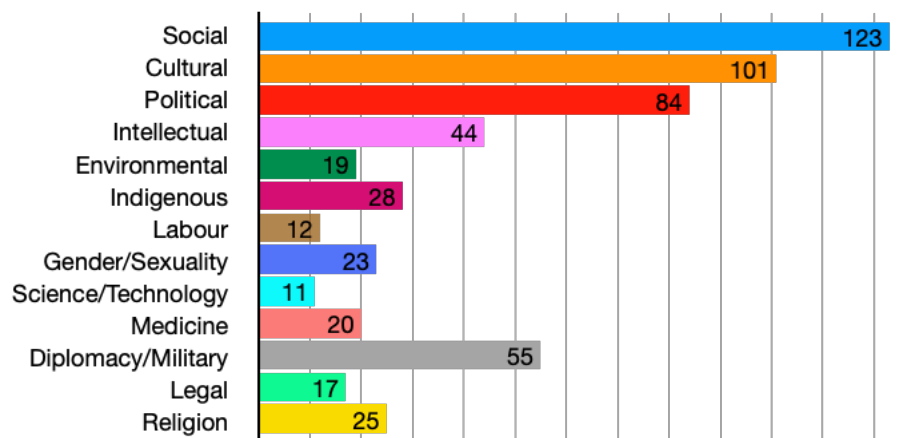
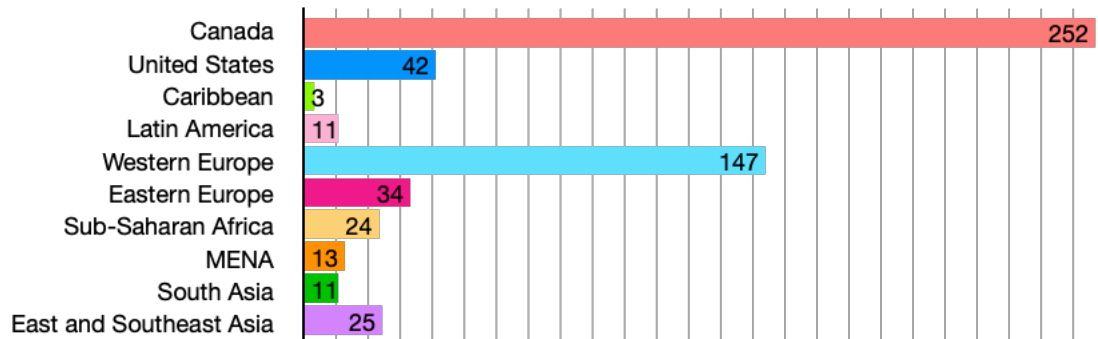
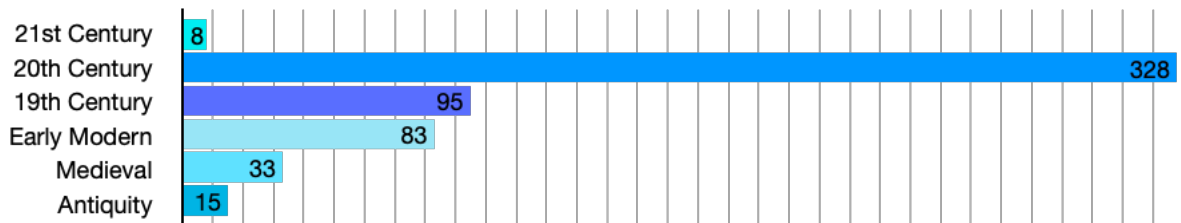


**Cumulative Percentage of Completed History Dissertations in Canada Relative to Years Elapsed from Entering PhD Program, September 2016-August 2022, n=355**

More than half of the dissertations focused on the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 460 dissertations were written in English, 102 in French. Geographically, 45% of the dissertations examined Canadian-claimed Indigenous territories. Social history was the most frequent subfield; however, dissertations were fairly well-spread across thematic areas.

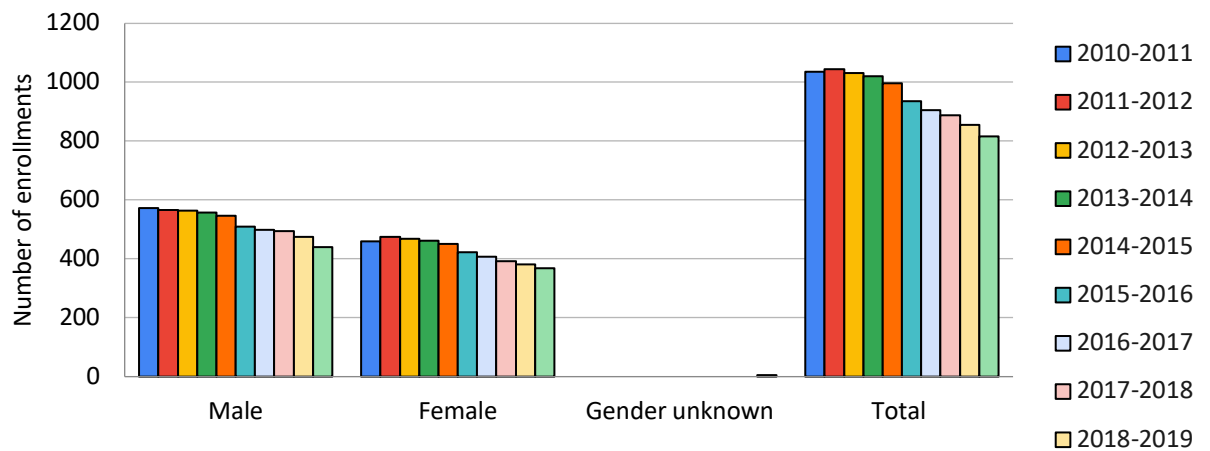


Time to Completion of History Dissertations in Canada, September 2016-August 2022,  
n=355



History Dissertations in Canada by Temporal Scope, Geographical Focus, and Field of Study, 2016-17 to 2021-22

## Enrolments in Canadian History programs for Doctoral students by Gender and Total Registration (part-time and full-time students)



Data source: Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0182-01 Postsecondary enrolments, by detailed field of study and International Standards

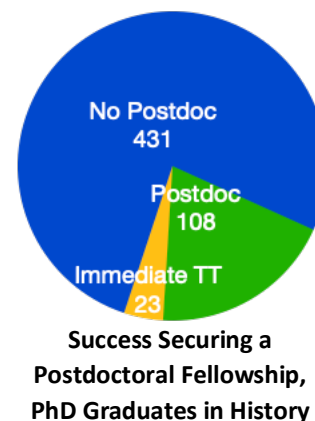
We do not know how many people withdrew from their doctoral programs. The survey we conducted suggested that very few students withdrew, but this probably reflects the nature of our question, which asked how many students who began their degrees in the past five years had withdrawn. Many more withdrawals may have taken place in later stages of the PhD program. A study conducted at the University of Saskatchewan suggested that 18% of history students who were enrolled from 1990-2015 withdrew, but since the study was published in 2018, this likely underestimates withdrawals, because presumably some of the students who started in 2013-15 or earlier, hadn't yet decided to leave the program or had not reached the degree duration limits.<sup>10</sup> A study for the U15 showed that 55.8% of students who entered a PhD in the humanities in 2001 had completed within 9 years, suggesting that withdrawal rates might be far higher.<sup>11</sup> As the report for the Council of the Canadian Academies, *Degrees of Success* argues, some students may start a PhD program and withdraw within a year or two, realizing that that the program was not for them. More concerning is slow attrition – students who withdraw years after completing all program requirements except the dissertation. These students have sacrificed many years of their lives in studying without finishing their degrees. While there are many reasons why students don't

<sup>10</sup> Martha Smith-Norris and Jennifer Hanson, "Graduate program outcomes in history 2000-2015: A humanities case study in Canada," *Journal of Educational Administration* 50, 3 (2018), 174-190.

<sup>11</sup> Rosanna Tamburri, "The PhD is in need of revision," *University Affairs* 6 February 2013 [https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/the-phd-is-in-need-of-revision/#latest\\_data](https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/the-phd-is-in-need-of-revision/#latest_data) Checked 9 September 2022.

complete, *Degrees of Success* identified “inadequate funding, high stress and poor mental health, poor thesis management and supervision and a lack of preparation.” It noted that many supervisors blame students for lacking the motivation to finish, while students are more likely to point to the lack of financial support, poor advising, or tricky departmental politics.<sup>12</sup>

Of the 562 Ph.D. recipients in 2016-17 to 2021-22, 23 (4%) secured tenure-track jobs immediately (as discussed below, a total of 58 (10%) have been hired into tenure-track jobs thus far). The total should rise to some small extent over the next few years, as very recent graduates accept tenure-track positions. 45 (8%) work in History departments, 13 (2%) work in departments beyond the discipline. Only 36 (6%) work in Canada, with another 22 (4%) employed at universities in the United States, Europe, South Asia, East Asia, or Australia.



Another 108 historians received a postdoctoral fellowship no more than two years after finishing. In Canada and abroad, postdoctoral fellowships are funded by a range of government agencies, universities, research institutions, grant-funded principal investigators, and non-government organizations. The table below surveys the recent success of historians in obtaining the most common postdocs, funded by SSHRC or FRQSC.

#### New Federal and Provincial Postdoctoral Fellowship Recipients in History, 2016-17 to 2020-21

Scholarship	Terms	Max. Value	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
<b>SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship</b>	Through 2017-18, \$40,500 per annum for up to two years. From 2018-19, \$45,000 per annum for up to two years.	\$90,000	12	14	8	13	9
<b>Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship</b>	\$70,000 per annum for up to two years.	\$140,000	1	1	2	1	2
<b>Le Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et</b>	\$45,000 per annum for up to two years within Quebec. As much as \$55,000 per	\$110,000	-	-	6	4	5

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Council of Academies, *Degrees of Success*, 14, 44-5.

<b>culture (FRQSC) Bourse postdoctorale</b>	annum for up two years when held more than 250 km beyond Quebec's borders.						
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From 2016-17 to 2021-22, 87 new assistant professors began work in History Departments at Canadian universities. (There was also some movement in this category – some people were hired at one Canadian university and moved to another one in the same time period – the details of their first hirings were not counted.) The below table indicates the number of hirings by department.

**New Tenure-Track Assistant Professors in History, by University, 2016-17 to 2021-22**

University of Toronto	8	Brock University	1
University of British Columbia	7	Carleton University	1
McGill University	4	Université de Saint-Boniface	1
Queen's University	4	Université de Moncton (Edmunston Campus)	1
York University	4	Université de Sherbrooke	1
Université du Québec à Montréal	4	Université du Québec à Chicoutimi	1
University of Saskatchewan	4	Université Sainte-Anne	1
Cape Breton University	3	University of Alberta	1
Concordia University	3	University of Calgary	1
Saint Mary's University	3	University of King's College	1
Université de Montréal	3	University of Lethbridge	1
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières	3	University of New Brunswick	1
University of Manitoba	3	University of Northern British Columbia	1
Dalhousie University	2	University of Waterloo	1
MacEwan University	2	University of Winnipeg	1
Toronto Metropolitan University	2	Western University	1
University of British Columbia - Okanagan	2		
University of Guelph	2		
University of Regina	2		
University of Victoria	2		
Vancouver Island University	2		
York University (Glendon Campus)	2		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>87</b>

60% of these 87 historians had degrees from Canadian universities, 31% had degrees from American universities, while a handful had degrees from British and French universities. A significant number of people (just over 25%) were hired immediately following the completion of the degree or ABD, while a small majority held a postdoctoral fellowship. The vast majority (70%) of people who found tenure-track employment were hired within two years of completing their doctorate. A significant number of people (at least 13%) completed their degrees outside of history departments including Canadian Studies, Indigenous Studies, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, Classics, Divinity, and variously named Science and Technology programs.

Among the 87 historians, graduates from University of Toronto and York were significantly more likely to be hired at Canadian institutions than graduates of other universities. This is partly because Toronto graduates so many PhDs, not because their rate of success is particularly high. According to our database of dissertations completed, only 14% of University of Toronto graduates have secured tenure-track employment. According to the same database, 14% of York PhD graduates are in tenure-track jobs. No other Canadian university had more than 4 of their PhD graduates hired at Canadian institutions in this time period. Indeed, Yale has a much higher success rate in Canadian History departments (5 hired) than any Canadian institution, with the exception of York and Toronto.

Of the people who completed their degrees outside of Canada and then were hired at a Canadian university, at least 40% were Canadian citizens, or at least arbitrarily classified as such, recognizing that some Indigenous scholars would not identify with this citizenship. It was not always possible to gauge citizenship but it seems that just under a quarter of all of the positions went to people who were neither Canadian citizens or landed immigrants when they were hired. This problem seems to be more visible or exaggerated at some institutions than others – in our data set, two of the U15 universities seem to hire more people who have no previous experience of living in or studying in Canada. Others have mostly hired Canadians, or those born within the imposed borders of Canada, although admittedly the sample sizes are small and this may be a short-term trend connected to changed hiring priorities as a result of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Anecdotally, this problem seems to magnify over time: departments with large numbers of people who were trained entirely outside of Canada may devalue Canadian degrees more than departments who hired people who completed at least some of their studies in Canada. Some institutions appear to regularly work around the rules that require universities to prioritize the hiring of Canadians and permanent residents.<sup>13</sup> Another thing to keep in mind with this discussion is that the US/Canada border is an artifact of colonialism and for Indigenous scholars, in particular, part of the process of

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<sup>13</sup> The rules and procedures can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/academic/recruitment.html>



decolonizing our institutions is recognizing the artificiality of the border and its sometimes inappropriate prominence and application in our hiring processes and practices.

While the number of people being hired relative to the number completing PhDs is particularly bleak right now – a result of the massive expansion of doctoral education in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, declining undergraduate history enrollments, provincial cutbacks to universities and a growing reluctance by universities to establish tenure-track lines in favour of contractually-limited ones, the trend of hiring scholars from non-Canadian institutions in fields outside of Canadian history is longstanding.<sup>14</sup> Although not every department updates its information every year, the AHA Directory of History Departments and Organizations gives us some sense of the composition of Canadian History Departments. Where the departments did not submit information to the AHA Directory, the data was collected from department websites.

Taken together, 45% of the fulltime faculty complement of the Departments whose doctoral programmes we surveyed is made up scholars with PhDs from Canadian institutions. 55% have degrees from institutions outside Canada. That said, as the chart below indicates, there was great variation, ranging from a low of 20% of faculty with Canadian degrees, to a high of nearly 90%. The larger departments have the fewest faculty with Canadian PhDs. They may also be the ones most likely to have resources to hire.

We take two approaches to examine the number of PhDs completed and tenure track hirings in geographic areas. The first adopts a traditional approach, mirroring a more standard geographic division of the discipline and thus our history departments. Using this first approach, we examine the number of PhDs completed and in certain geographic fields with the number of hirings. These geographic fields include Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, and Oceania.

<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>TT Hirings</b>	<b># of TT Hirings who completed their PhD in Canada</b>	<b>Completed PhDs at Canadian Institutions</b>	<b>People who found a History TT job at a Canadian university as a percentage of people who completed a History PhD at a Canadian institution over the 2016-7-2021-22 period.</b>
Canada	37	36	252	14%

<sup>14</sup> A portrait of the massive increase in doctoral education can be found in Canadian Association of Graduate Studies 44<sup>th</sup> Statistical Report. <https://secureservercdn.net/45.40.150.54/ozz.a2b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-44th-Statistical-Report-Part-1-Englishoct2.pdf> Checked 22 September 2022. This is not as pronounced in the humanities as it is in the physical and life sciences and technologies, but there is still a substantial increase from 1992-2015.

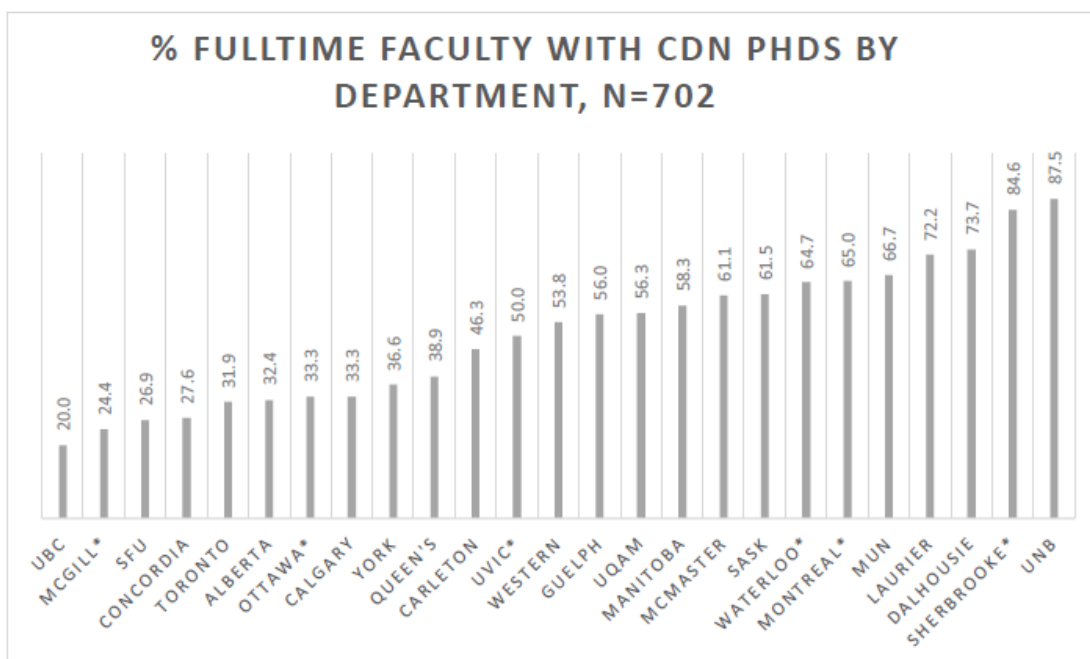
United States	9	1	42	2%
Caribbean	2	0	3	0%
Latin America	2	1	11	9%
Europe	20	7	181	4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	5	2	24	8%
Middle East and North Africa	5	4	13	31%
South Asia	0		11	0%
East and Southeast Asia	7	2	21	10%
Oceania	0	0	0	Nul
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>9%</b>

This data suggests that PhD graduates at Canadian institutions who study Canada, Latin America, Africa, or Asian history are slightly more likely to find tenure-track employment in Canada than those who study European or American history. We could not trace the whereabouts of everyone, so it is possible that people are in tenure-track employment elsewhere in the world, but of the 42 graduates in US history, we found only two with tenure-track employment outside of Canada. Of the 181 graduates in European history, we found only 5 with tenure-track employment outside of Canada.

Our second approach to examining the number of PhDs completed and tenure-track hirings in geographic fields adopts a decolonizing framework. Using this second approach, we shift Indigenous-centred scholars and scholarship from the field of study category (where they are typically positioned) to the geographic area category to underscore the centrality of territory to Indigenous peoples and to challenge structures of colonialism as imbued in the discipline and throughout our departments. We do so by resituating the works of Indigenous scholars and/or Indigenous-centred scholarship, recognizing that by their very nature, such scholars and their knowledge creation do not blindly accept the geographic divisions of our discipline as premised on colonial and settler colonial frameworks. Nonetheless, we recognize that moving forward, a more robust reorientation of geographic areas is required in our discipline to acknowledge the primacy of Indigenous territories in our histories, regardless of whether topical focus is on Indigenous peoples and their histories.

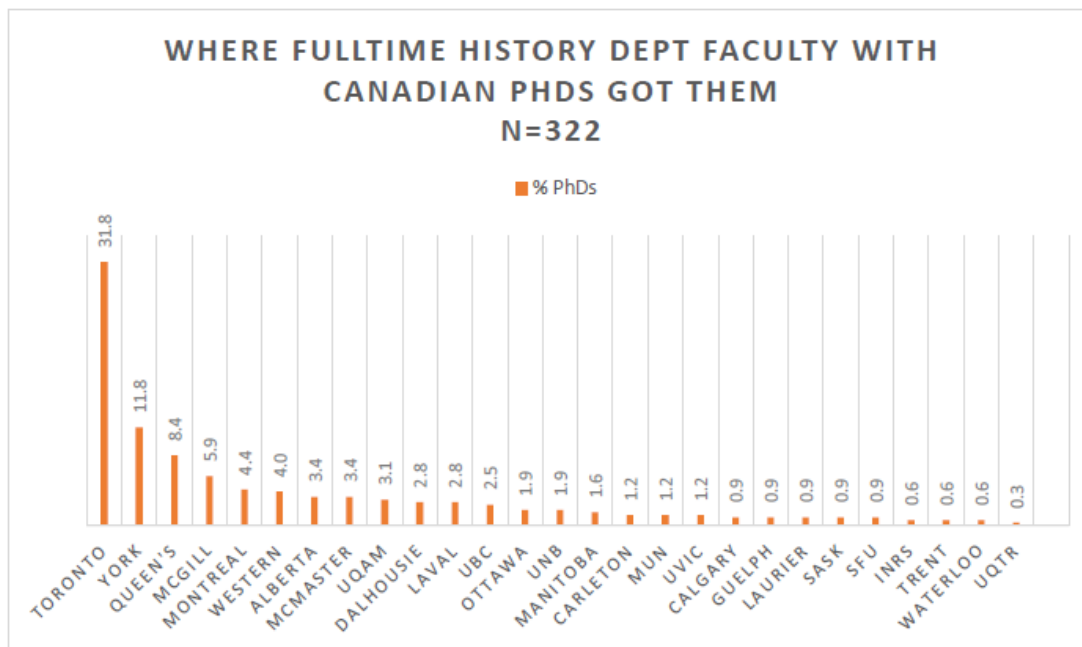
<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>TT Hirings</b>	<b># of TT Hirings who completed their PhD in Canada</b>	<b>Completed PhDs at Canadian Institutions</b>	<b>People who found a History TT job at a Canadian university as a percentage of people who completed a History PhD at a Canadian institution over the 2016-7-2021-22 period.</b>
Indigenous	11	10	28	36%
Canada	27	26	227	11%
United States	8	1	42	2%
Caribbean	2	0	3	0%
Latin America	2	1	9	10%
Europe	20	7	179	4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	5	2	24	8%
Middle East and North Africa	5	4	13	31%
South Asia	0		11	0%
East and Southeast Asia	7	2	19	11%
Oceania	0	0	0	Nul
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>9%</b>

This revised data suggests notable trends in the training of PhD students. Most notably, while there is an increased demand for Indigenous and Indigenous-centred scholars, PhD history training at Canadian institutions is not meeting this growing demand, especially for Indigenous scholars. We need to ensure that more Indigenous faculty are being trained in our PhD programs.

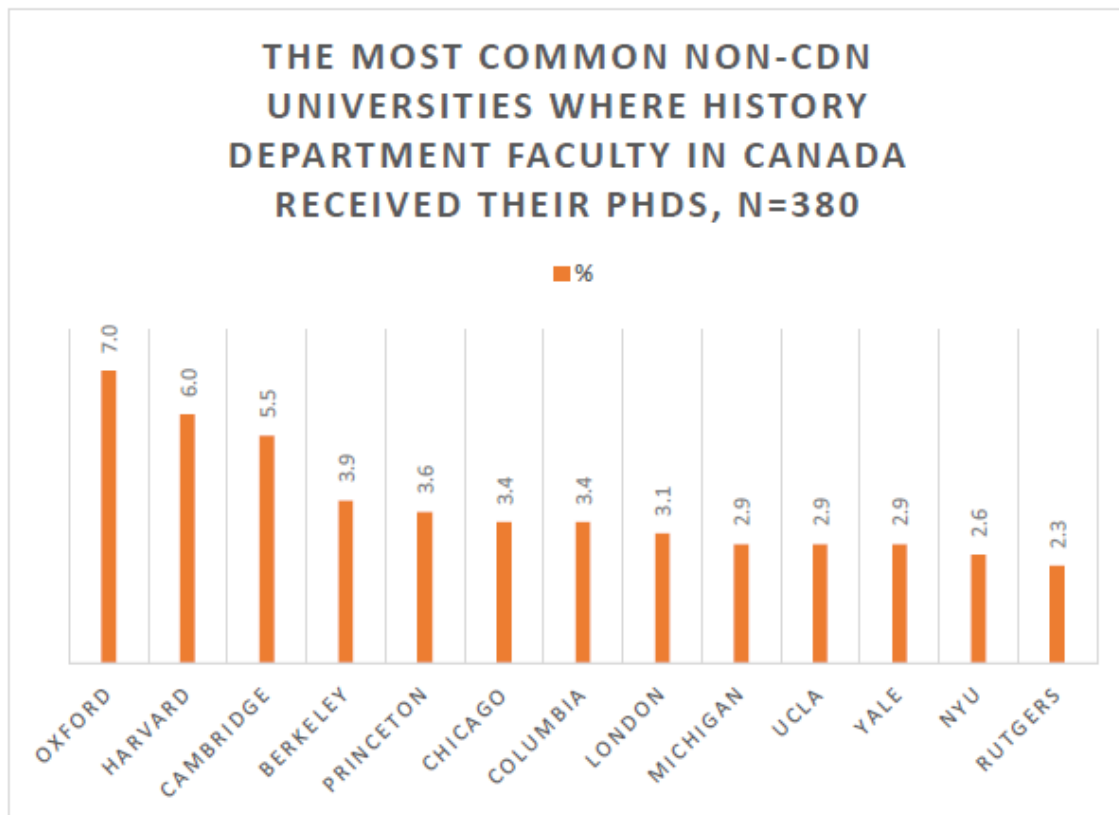


25 of the 26 departments the Task Force surveyed are represented above. Information for Université Laval was not readily available. The data were gathered from the AHA Directory of History Departments and Organizations, except for those departments with asterisks. In those cases, the data was compiled from Department websites

It is also clear that historically people graduating from the larger institutions are more likely to find tenure-track employment. Toronto, York and Queen's account for more than half of the doctorates held by full-time history faculty in the departments surveyed by the Task Force.



The emphasis Canadian history departments place on “prestige” is clear from this chart and the one below, which shows where people who were not trained in Canada received their PhDs. At some institutions, it is unusual for anyone other than Canadianists to have completed their degree in Canada. This seems to suggest that at those institutions, the people responsible for making hiring decisions place little value on the PhD in History at Canadian Institutions.



As a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the growing recognition of the systemic exclusion of Indigenous people from the Academy and the vibrancy of the field right now, there have been a large number of hires in Indigenous history in recent years – 11 in the time period under study here, but we know of another 3 who started 1 July 2022, so 14 altogether, about half of whom identify as Indigenous scholars. Some of these scholars were trained at smaller departments. Many Canadian universities are also reckoning with their institutional connections to the slave trade and the history of anti-Black racism on campus and there have been a small number of hires in Black Canadian and Black Atlantic history, some of whom were trained at US universities.<sup>15</sup> Even so, priority is still given to geographical fields that are defined in such a way that they (e.g. Canadian history) do not respect Indigenous sovereignty nor the longstanding histories of Indigenous peoples on their territories. Priority is also given to linear history and to a periodization that does not necessarily reflect how Indigenous people understand and tell their histories.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson and Student Authors, *Slavery and McGill University Bicentenary Recommendations* (2020) [https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations\\_and\\_Report.pdf](https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations_and_Report.pdf) and Dr. Afua Cooper et al, *Report on Lord Dalhousie's History on Slavery and Race* (2019) [https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/ldp/Lord%20Dal%20Panel%20Final%20Report\\_web.pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/ldp/Lord%20Dal%20Panel%20Final%20Report_web.pdf)

There is also concern about the temporal breadth of history departments. We noted that 20<sup>th</sup> century historians accounted for 62% of all hires with 18.4% of hires studying the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This roughly maps with PhDs completed: 58% of PhD degrees are completed in 20<sup>th</sup> century history and another 17% in 19<sup>th</sup> century history, leaving relatively few people studying earlier time periods.

To conclude, most PhD graduates are not finding jobs in academia. Appendix 2 offers a portrait of where the 562 History PhDs actually found work, based on LinkedIn and other internet sources. While our webinars showed that many PhD graduates are finding rewarding careers elsewhere, there are still many PhD students who hope to find careers in academia. In Ontario, a 2012 study showed that 86% of students in the humanities undertook a PhD in the hopes of securing a job as a university professor.<sup>16</sup> While this may be declining and most PhD students in history are aware of the bleak academic job market, many still hope to be one of the lucky few that obtains secure academic employment. This contributes to their stress and anxiety while completing their PhD programs. Graduate students have also noted that they do not feel their training prepares them for careers outside academia, causing additional distress on upper-year students who feel they must independently seek out external opportunities and skills while completing their dissertation work. We heard a great deal from graduate directors and from PhD students themselves about the emotional difficulties of completing a PhD in today's tough job market. One graduate director referred to himself as the "feudal lord of despair." These problems have only been made worse by the pandemic, which has made it that much more difficult for students to complete their dissertations by delaying their travel to archives.

Key to the despair is the funding situation.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments and supervisors make themselves fully aware of the patterns of hiring, the bleak academic job market, and the stress and anxiety this creates for PhD students.

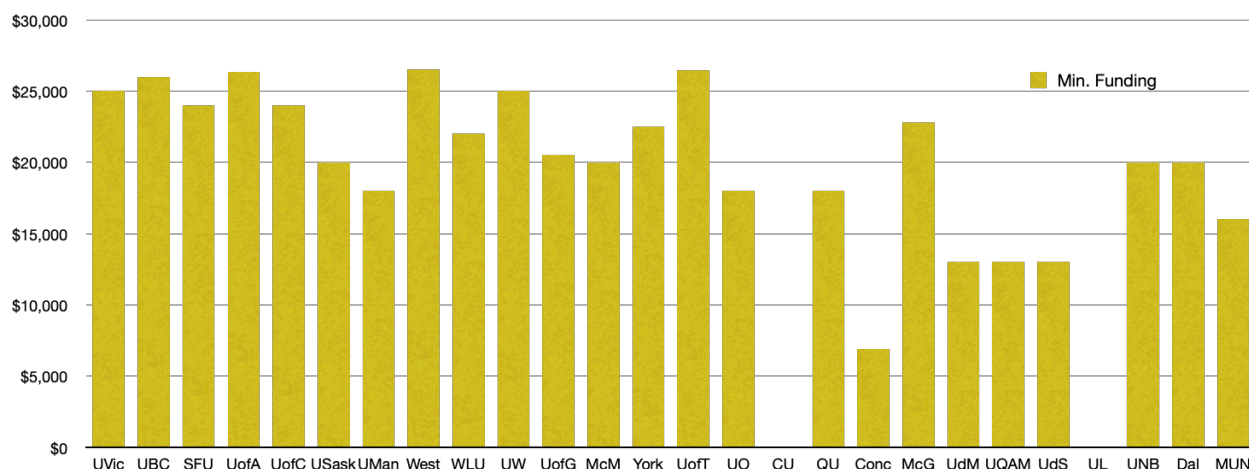
## Funding

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<sup>16</sup> Conference Board of Canada, *Inside and Outside*, 16.

Most programs guarantee four years of minimum funding. Several departments – McGill, University of Victoria, University of Calgary and the University of Toronto have moved towards five years of funding. York has six years of funding. Partial fifth-year funding is worked out in practice in a few other programs. The funding commitment is only two years at Concordia and three at UQAM and Université de Montréal. Guaranteed funding can vary from as little as \$0 to approximately \$27 000 (this includes TAs and Scholarships).

Much of the guaranteed funding goes to pay tuition, university and student society fees, health and



**Gross Annual Minimum Funding for Domestic Ph.D Students by History Department in Canada**

dental insurance premiums, and, often, the cost of a student transit pass. The University of Toronto, has the largest graduate program and the most generous funding for the first five years, serves as an example.

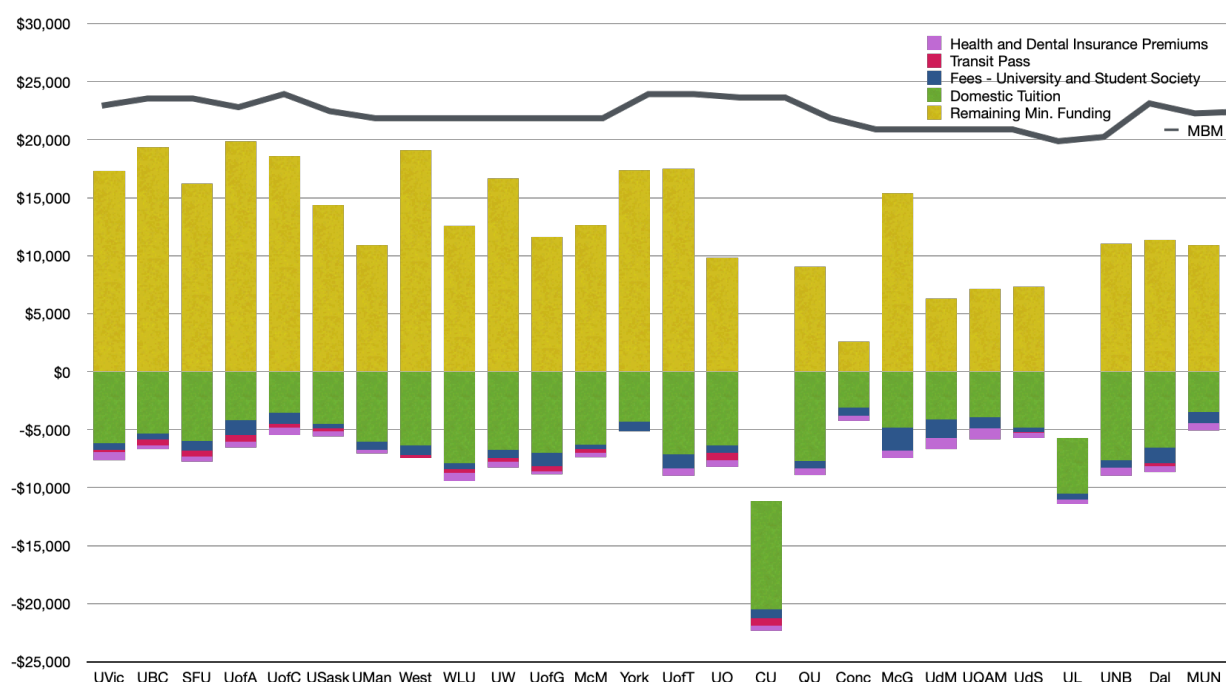
Guaranteed Funding:	\$27 055
Tuition:	\$6 210
Ancillary fees:	\$1 844
Estimated Rent in Toronto:	\$12 000/year - \$32 400 <sup>17</sup>
Cost of Living Toronto (not including rent):	\$15 804 <sup>18</sup>

Even if one were paying the lowest possible rent of \$1000/month, which University of Toronto assumes would mean having a room in a shared house, expenses exceed the guaranteed funding package by almost \$9000/year.

<sup>17</sup> Estimates from Toronto Student Life: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/living-costs-in-toronto/>

<sup>18</sup> Provided by Numbeo: <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Toronto>



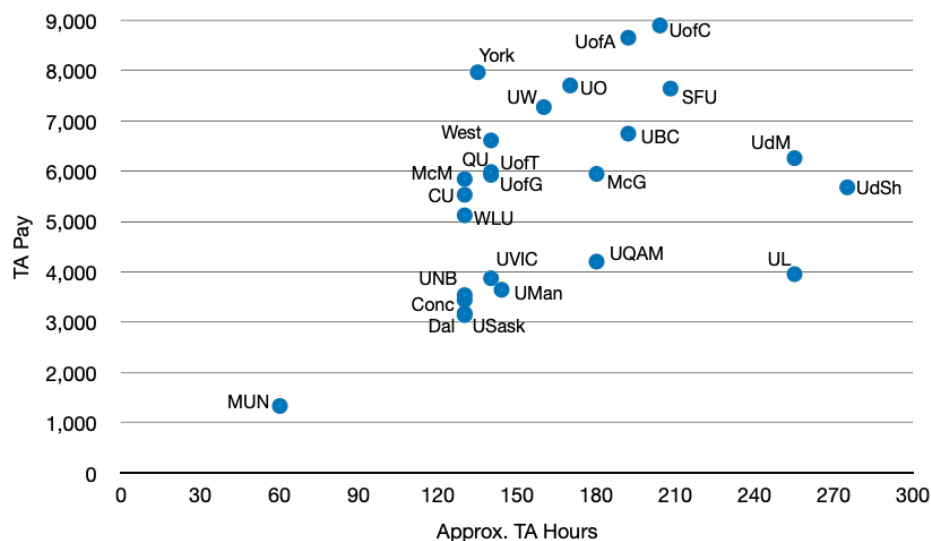


#### Net Annual Minimum Funding for Domestic Ph.D Students by History Department in Canada

The line at the top of this graph is Canada's Market Basket Measure (MBM - Canada's Poverty Line) by City<sup>19</sup>

We have highlighted the University of Toronto because it has the highest guaranteed funding and the largest number of PhD students. After tuition is deducted from the funding package, no history program in Canada offers students more than \$20 000/year. This is far less than the cost of living in any city in Canada. Furthermore, TA pay which almost always makes up the majority of net annual minimum income, is taxable, further eroding students' incomes. If PhD students forswore a TAship to travel for research, leave campus, or any other reason, the impact on their income would be substantial. As the graph below shows, TA pay and required hours of work vary from university to university.

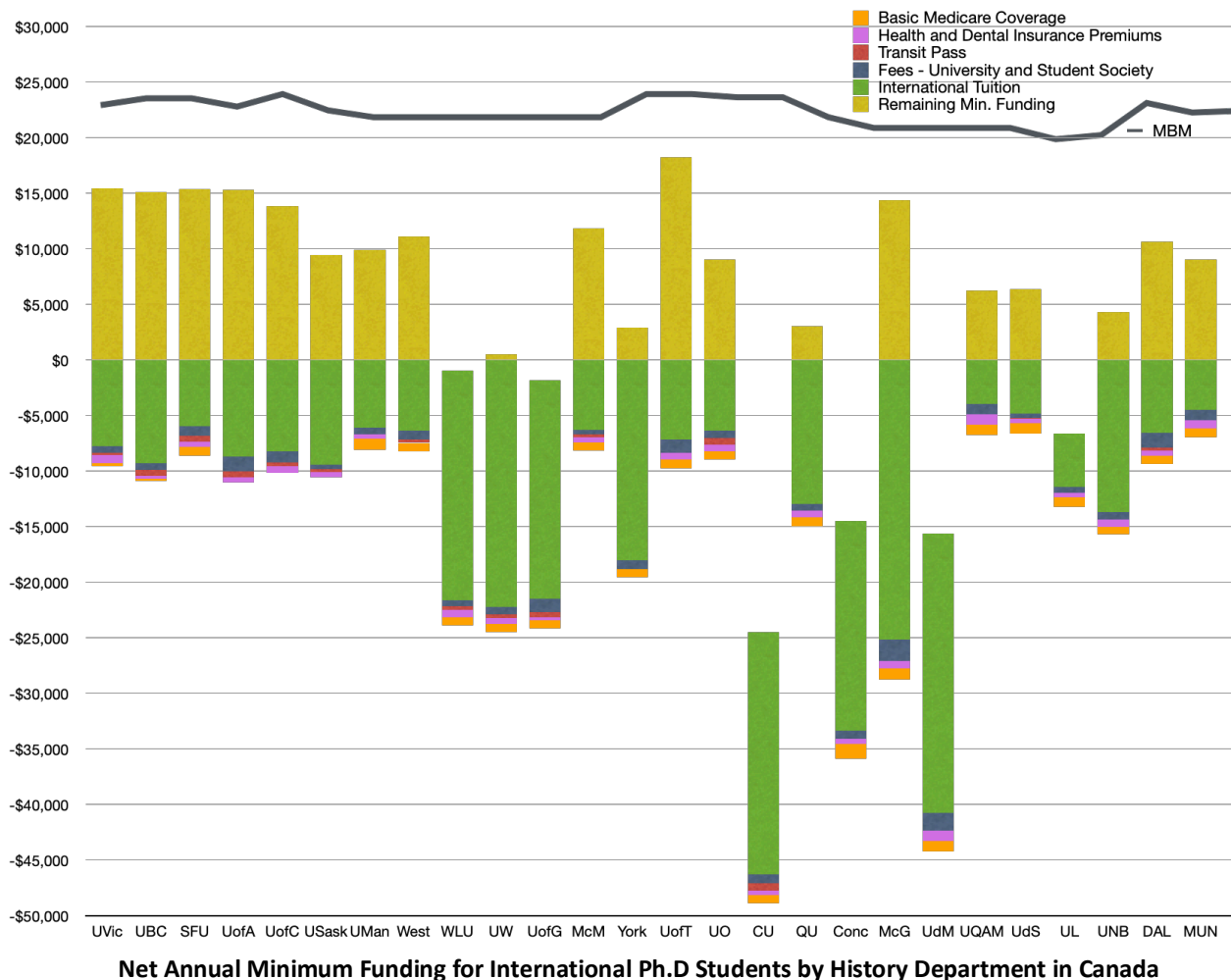
<sup>19</sup> For information about the Market Based Measure (MBM) see:  
<https://communitydata.ca/sites/default/files/Understanding-MBM-STC-Feb12.pdf>



**Teaching Assistant Pay and Work Hours, per Course Contract, by University<sup>20</sup>**

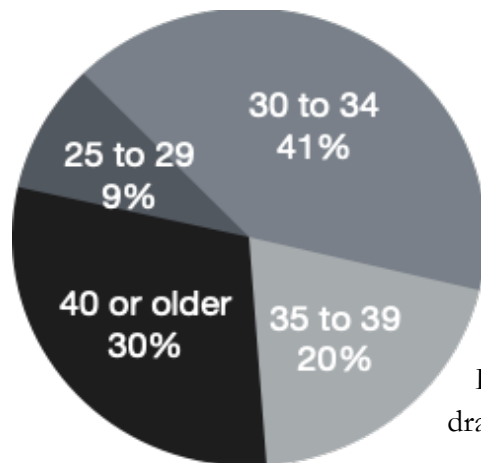
The minimum funding situation is even more varied (and occasionally more drastic) for international students. The stated gross minimum funding promises to international students are identical everywhere but the University of Toronto, which offers international students slightly more. However, international students usually face up to two additional costs. First, international students must secure basic medicare coverage. In Saskatchewan and Alberta, international students can simply enroll in tax-funded provincial healthcare insurance programs. In all other provinces, international students must pay for basic medical insurance through a private insurer. Second, at some institutions, international students may pay the same tuition as domestic students. At other universities, they pay far more than Canadians or landed immigrants.

<sup>20</sup> The information is drawn from collective agreements. The presented figures are from the most recently available academic year, so the comparison is imperfect. Sometimes, agreements offered concrete numbers from 2021-22, while others specified information for one or more academic years prior.



Although tuition is much lower in Quebec, guaranteed funding is also much less at Concordia and at the francophone universities. At Université de Montréal, for example, students are only promised \$10 000 over three years, although this does not include any TAs that the student might have. At Laval, the scholarships are in the form of awards that are given after the completion of a particular milestone – publishing an article, finishing the coursework etc. and they are small just \$1500-\$3000. We heard from francophone colleagues that many PhD students in their institutions are work full-time and pursue their PhDs part-time. We also heard from graduate chairs that many students struggled near the end of their program as debt mounted; they were forced to take an additional work; and completing the dissertation became harder and harder.

The other thing to keep in mind is that PhD students are not young. The majority of PhD graduates in the humanities in Canada (61%) are in their 30s. Presumably many of them have dependents. Another 30% of them are in their 40s.<sup>21</sup>



**Statistics Canada, Humanities Doctoral Graduates by Age, 2018.**

To complete their studies, PhD students require adequate funding. If students are required to self-fund their History PhD programs (to whatever extent), they must either draw on their family's savings or borrow money. This is a significant barrier for many prospective students, it is particularly so for first-generation students, racialized students and Indigenous students, who are least likely to have the family financial resources to support their studies.

Given the dire need to diversify our profession, the lack of funding must be considered a serious equity issue.

An important factor shaping the different department funding capacities is access to endowed scholarships. UNB and Queen's, for examples, have department-controlled awards endowed by generous donors. The funds give the departments the autonomy to award scholarships to support at least some of their PhD students. This is rarely the case at other institutions, especially in francophone Quebec.

Students may be able to pick up additional work on campus as research assistants, TAs, sessional instructors, or writing advisors, though on-campus work may be restricted. Some students also take jobs beyond the university. This makes it very hard to complete the PhD in the time period in which students have funding (usually 3-5 years).

## External Funding

Provincial and federal scholarships are the primary source of external funding for History PhD students. Major provincial scholarship programs exist only in Ontario (the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)), Alberta Graduate Excellence Research Scholarship, and Quebec (*Bourse de*

<sup>21</sup> Data source: Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0135-01 Postsecondary graduates, by field of study, International Standard Classification of Education, age group and gender  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710013501-eng>

*doctorat en recherche* (FRQSC), which can be held at a Canadian or foreign university). Three levels of federal funding are awarded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to selected applicants from across the country.

The below table summarizes doctoral scholarship information and recent awards to historians.

**New Federal and Provincial Doctoral Scholarship Recipients in History, 2016-17 to 2020-21**

Scholarship	Terms	Max. Value	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
<b>SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship</b>	\$20,000 per annum for up to four years	\$80,000	38	27	32	37	38
<b>Canadian Graduate Scholarship (CGS) Doctoral</b>	\$35,000 per annum for up to three years	\$105,000	23	28	35	32	32
<b>Vanier Canadian Graduate Scholarship</b>	\$50,000 per annum for up to three years	\$150,000	5	3	6	2	0
<b>Le Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et culture (FRQSC) Bourse doctorat en recherche</b>	\$21,000 per annum for up to four years	\$84,000	-	-	9	8	5
<b>Le Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et culture (FRQSC) Bourse doctorat en recherche pour étudiants étrangers</b>	\$21,000 per annum for up to four years	\$84,000	-	-	0	1	Ceased to be separate award.
<b>Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)</b>	\$15,000 per annum for up to four years	\$60,000	Administered by Ontario universities. Comprehensive data is unavailable.				
<b>Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship</b>	\$11,000 to \$15,000 per annum for up to six years, awarded one year at a time	\$90,000	Administered by Alberta universities. Comprehensive data is unavailable.				

The value of these scholarships has not increased in a very long time. SSHRC increased from \$15 000 to \$17 500 and then to \$20 000 around the turn of the century. The CGS program was introduced in 2003 and the dollar amount has stayed the same since then, meaning that inflation has cut the value of these scholarships by a third. In the meantime, tuition in provinces outside of Quebec has risen rapidly. History departments often require their students to apply – and re-apply – for these provincial and federal scholarships. These scholarships are most valuable when students win them at the beginning of their programs. SSHRC will not fund PhD students past their fifth year of study. Therefore, to take the prime example, only prospective or first-year PhD students can receive the maximum four years of SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship funding. Upper year PhD students can only receive funding that takes them to 60 months (5 years) of study. PhD students who receive a CGS or Vanier scholarship find themselves making a livable wage, which is wonderful. But it also creates divides between the winners of these scholarships and their financially precarious peers.

PhD students might hope that winning a SSHRC, OGS, or FRQSC similarly provides them with adequate pay. Unfortunately, many departments factor provincial and federal scholarship competitions into their budgeting. Departments count on a portion of their students gaining external funding. Though not universally so, departments often need to “claw back” internal grants from who students secure external awards. The internal money is needed to cover minimum funding commitments to incoming or continuing PhD students who have yet not attracted external funding. This helps even out the disparities among students, but it means that for recipients of the lower-value external scholarships such as an OGS or a \$20 000 SSHRC, their income may not change much. But there is one clear advantage to external funding. Department minimum funding promises are often dependent on students working as a TA. External scholarships tip student income towards grant money independent of TA work. Students can forgo TAs. Or if they continue to work as a TA, they are able to boost their income above the minimum funding level.

Three classes of PhD students emerge, with important implications on income and workload: (a) those who hold a CGS or Vanier scholarship. They earn a livable wage through scholarship income alone and can forgo TA work to get on with their research and writing; (b) those who receive a lower-value federal or provincial grant. They can approach a livable wage if they continue to supplement their scholarship income with TA work, even if that might detract from research time and travel; and (c) those who have not (or who have not yet) won an external scholarship. They earn less than a livable wage, all while their income is significantly tied to TA work which takes away from research – if students can even afford to travel for research.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the CHA/SHC, in coordination with other humanities and social science associations, lobby the provincial and federal governments to increase the number of external scholarships and to increase the value of SSHRC, AGES, OGS, and FRQSC funding.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Federation of Social Sciences and Humanities of Canada lobby the provincial and federal governments to increase the number of external scholarships and to increase the value of SSHRC, AGES, OGS, and FRQSC funding

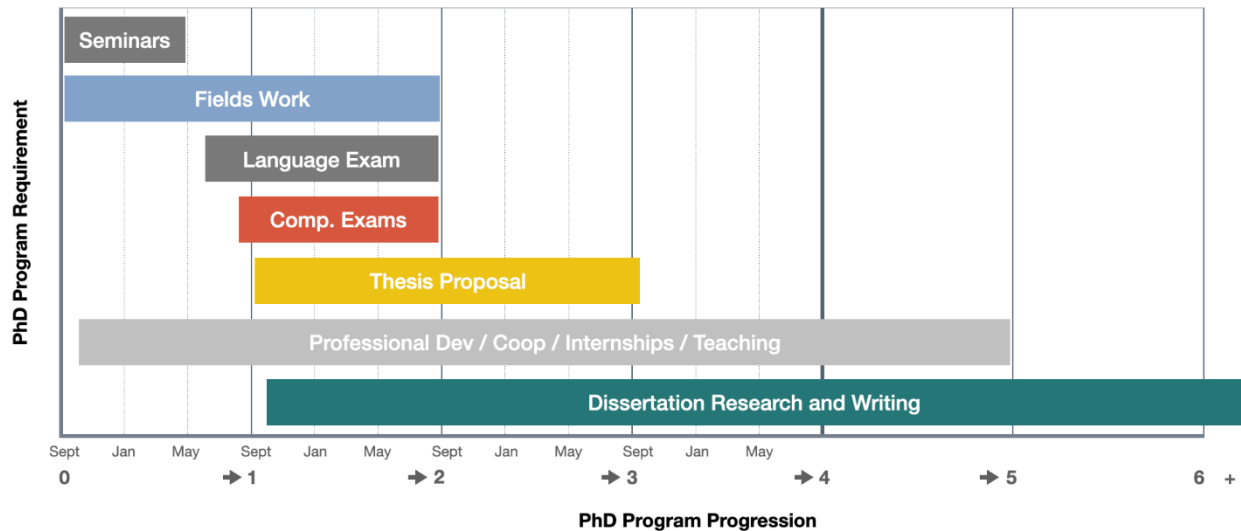
**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments arrange funding packages so that it is possible for students to forgo TAs at key times when they should be intensively focusing on their research, which might include travel.

**RECOMMENDATION:** We recognize that most departments have little control over the funding that they can provide graduate students. Even so, we hope that departments do everything possible to increase funding for their PhD students including making it clear to other levels of administration the inadequacy of the current funding. This may involve working with university development offices to raise funds for awards.

### **Changing PhD Programs**

Given that most departments guarantee PhD funding for just 4 years when the time to completion is between 6 and 7 years, departments must also look closely at the possibility of changing their programs to close the gap between the years of guaranteed funding and the years needed to complete the degree. We heard from graduate directors that there is often considerable resistance to change on the part of some faculty, who are concerned that reducing requirements will diminish the quality of their PhD programs and hurt their students on the academic job market. This committee urges departments to take a hard look at student outcomes. Very few of our graduates are finding tenured academic employment. The level of stress and despair among PhD students is high, especially among those who are beyond their funding period. There is a dire need to diversify the pool of PhD graduates and this will only happen if people can afford to undertake and finish their PhD program.

Many programs have already made changes. Usually, these changes focus on the first two years of student program allowing them to begin their research and writing sooner, and, ultimately, complete their dissertations faster. This is a composite of what PhD programs look like across the country:



**Composite of History PhD Program Requirements in Canada, Showing Earliest to Latest Student Progress**

In meeting with the faculty who chair their department's graduate programs, it seems that many departments have reduced the number of required courses, integrated courses and course completion into the comprehensive field examination process, and/or reduced the number of comprehensive examination fields and/or books required for those fields.

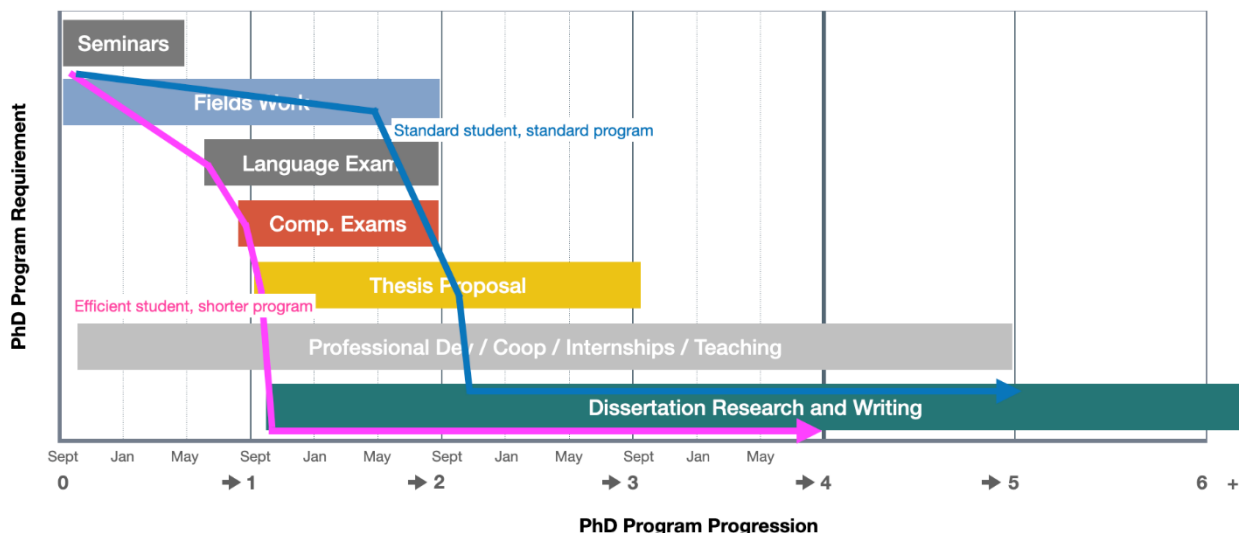
In our survey, there was very little support for eliminating course work all together (2.4% of respondents in the English survey; 2.2% in the French survey). Reducing course work and/or eliminating required courses garnered support from only 15% of English respondents and less than 10% of the French respondents. Many respondents valued course work for the breadth and depth of knowledge it provided students beyond their particular specialty, and for the cohort development and collegiality it fostered among students. Others drew finer distinctions, valuing course work that fed directly into their preparation for comprehensive field examinations, or courses that were "practical," including those focused on methodology, the historiography relevant to the student's dissertation, and/or teaching, writing, and publishing.

Views about comprehensive examinations were divided: 21% thought no modifications to comprehensive exams were required; 27% of English respondents and 28% of French respondents supported replacing one or more comprehensive examination fields with the opportunity to teach a course; and 28% of English respondents and 30% of French respondents supported replacing one or more of the comprehensive examination fields with a co-op internship. The diversity of responses is explained somewhat in the comments people gave in our survey. Many people believed that the purpose of comprehensive examinations was to ensure students read widely and gained a broad and deep knowledge of their fields of study and how those fields had developed. Phrases like



That said, some of those who valued the process of reading widely questioned whether an examination was the best way to evaluate what and whether students had learned. One called the whole process “brutal” and another labelled it a “kind of academic hazing.” Others questioned whether it was even possible to “comprehensively master a field” now, and if not, whether the purpose of the exercise, and hence how it is evaluated needs to be reconsidered. Indeed, if “mastery” is impossible, many respondents felt that comprehensive fields needed to be tailored more closely to students’ dissertation topics rather than being designed to give them a broad foundation of knowledge. Graduate students also commented on the comprehensive examination process, noting that the assessment method was not an accurate measure of the stated outcomes, that testing environments can be harsh and anxiety-inducing, and that the process itself is not tied to any future academic or non-academic skills.

That said, there is variation among programs in the relationship of courses to comprehensive fields, in the numbers of fields and books required, and in the examination process. We heard some frustration from graduate students that program requirements can now differ significantly across



institutions. These differences cause inequities in scholarship/grant applications, job applications and time to disseminate their research at conferences and through publications. These inequities can also affect students' perception of their own progress. It is also worth noting that even if a student proceeds as quickly as possible through their program, they might be held up by administrative hurdles or by a supervisor who fails to return drafts and respond to questions in a timely manner.

The course/field requirements differ across universities. At the University of Toronto, students take four courses, followed by a choice between two major fields (thematic and geographic) of 100 books each, or one major and two minor fields with 40-60 books each. Students are expected to write their written and oral exams by the end of Year 2. At the University of Saskatchewan, the courses doctoral students take are directly related to their major (100 books) and two minor (50 books each) comprehensive fields, allowing them to complete their written and oral comprehensive examinations by the fall of Year 2. In the Tri-University Program (Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier, and Waterloo), students' major and minor fields are facilitated by seminar courses. Only the major field is examined in the fall of Year 2. At Queen's, there is one required course (theories and methods in history); the other two courses students take are meant to feed directly into the major field and the minor field. Comprehensive examinations consist of designing, presenting, and defending a syllabus for a full-year (24-week) course in the major field, and a half-year (12-week) course for the minor field. They are meant to be completed by 30 June of Year 1. Students then spend the summer putting together a dissertation proposal which is presented and defended by 30 November of Year 2. McMaster has taken such streamlining further and eliminated comprehensive examinations. Instead, the student's major and minor fields are assessed within the readings courses they take, positioning them to defend a dissertation prospectus in the fall of Year 2. At UQAM, where there was no tradition of comprehensive exams, they have recently introduced a process consisting of two fields. The students draw up the lists, which consist of approximately 4500 pages of reading material for each field. There is a take-home exam, which students have approximately 2-3 weeks to complete. The intention is not to be "comprehensive" but to allow the students to do reading that will prepare them for their dissertation project.

The linking of comprehensive examinations to teaching suggests that for some departments, the purpose of the major and minor fields is to prepare students for teaching, as much as it is to promote breadth and support the dissertation. This is also a view shared by those who filled out the Task Force Survey.

As important as the changes that have been initiated are, however, there is a sense among some current students and faculty that more rethinking and restructuring is needed; specifically, programs should give students opportunities to acquire skills that will also be useful for the non-academic job market. Having students design undergraduate course syllabi, as Queen's and other departments do, is useful and a creative departure from standard comprehensive examination questions which ask doctoral students to write essays synthesizing and analyzing secondary literature. But such changes are premised on the assumption that doctoral programs should be solely focused on training

students for academic jobs. Departments may also want to consider “fields” which allow people to write position briefs, prepare exhibits, or do other types of work, including co-op placements which will help to position them for careers outside of academia.

Departments may also wish to consider including paid work-integrated learning (WIL) in their programs in addition to co-op. While it can take a variety of forms, paid work-integrated learning is aimed at allowing students to integrate their work experiences into their scholarly research. Such experiences get students off campus, into community and public spaces, and working collaboratively for and with non-scholars who have relevant expertise. Paid work-integrated learning has the advantage of being more flexible and accessible than a co-op placement. PhD Co-op can be rigid and for many students, it is not the right fit. Paid WIL offers “bite-size,” non-co-op work experiences, including the opportunity to pursue collaborative applied research and to start up projects of one’s own.

The PhD graduates working outside of academia emphasized the importance of being able to work as part of a team. They found this very rewarding, but it was not part of their PhD training. The *Degrees of Success Report* argues that part of the reason why PhDs are finding it difficult to have employers recognize their skills is because employers perceive that PhD graduates do not work well with others.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, more academic work, even in the field of history is being conducted in collaboration with others, especially in the case of community-based and community-led research. Why not incorporate more team projects into the PhD training?

We also need to think about the degree to which these requirements reflect colonial practices and act as a barrier to recruiting and nurturing a more diverse group of students. Are certain types of knowledge and performance prioritized in graduate classrooms, in field lists, and in the examination process itself? While Western academic cultures often reward showmanship in the graduate classroom, Indigenous students and students from other cultures might feel more comfortable listening, deliberating and speaking when called upon or when they have something meaningful to contribute to the discussion. Notably, non-interruption is an important teaching in many Indigenous cultures, which is, in many ways, counterintuitive to Western academic cultures. Further we must reconsider, what kinds of scholarship appears on qualifying exam lists? The tendency to emphasize scholarship that has stood the test of time means that voices that have been excluded from the academy are not always included. There is also a danger that such lists might prioritize scholarship saturated in colonial and racist thought. How often do we include books from other disciplines as part of our history-based coursework and qualifying exam lists? As SSHRC demands more evidence of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary collaboration, how well are we preparing students for future challenges if we ask them to read solely in the discipline of history? How do we incorporate community-based learning into this training? For example, could students who attend the Manitoulin Island Summer Historical Institute at the Ojibway Cultural Institute

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<sup>22</sup> Council of Academies, *Degrees of Success*, xxiv, 86.

receive course credit for this community-based learning program or a reduction in the number of books required for the qualifying exam?

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments re-think the initial stages of the PhD program (seminars, fields and comprehensive exams) to emphasize mastery of a specialized field of study for the dissertation, and a broad knowledge of historical approaches in other fields.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments consider whether or not their learning outcomes for their PhD program are measured by the existing program requirements.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments consider how to build more opportunities for collaboration into the first two years of the PhD program. This might include joint projects between students, collaborations between students and faculty members and collaborations with community groups.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments reconsider how they evaluate students' depth and breadth of knowledge, and particularly whether examinations are the best way of doing so.

Is it possible to give students opportunities to acquire the soft and hard skills mentioned by many of our webinar participants in the first two years of the PhD? We think so, though we acknowledge, as one of the survey respondents did, that many faculty do not necessarily have the expertise to teach such skills themselves, and expecting them to do so is unrealistic. Students undertake a vast array of careers after the PhD. Facilitating the development of skills beyond the capacity of history faculty will take administrative work and financial resources. Specifically, it will necessitate departments working with other campus units and community partners who can offer that training and/or funding students to avail themselves of training offered elsewhere.

Many programs require doctoral students to take a professional development (PD) course, often on a pass/fail basis. Indeed, over 35% of respondents to our survey believed doctoral students should be offered and take a professional development course. That said, these courses can be unpopular among students and could potentially lead to further delays with completion. Part of the problem with PD courses from a student perspective is that students are not consulted on what topics they would like to see; the courses often conflict with other major milestones (coursework, fields exams etc.) and PD is often offered in early stages of the program, despite the fact that at least some of what is discussed is only relevant to later stages (i.e. applying for postdoctoral fellowships). As we recommend elsewhere in the report, we believe that the CHA should be playing a larger role in professional development and that CHA seminars might provide a more flexible option for students and departments.

Existing courses in history could be replaced with training in languages (including programming languages), statistics, geographic information systems (GIS), oral history, or project management, to

give a few examples emerging from our discussions. Certainly, this is something those who answered our survey were supportive of. More than a third of respondents (36.5%) supported allowing students to substitute a course (including undergraduate courses) in statistics, geographic information systems (GIS), a language (including programming languages), or other “hard” skills-based courses for one or more of the courses required for the PhD.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments rethink the meaning of professional development and facilitate students pursuing opportunities to acquire hard and soft skills, whether by taking courses in other departments or technical training offered by other institutions. These should not just be additions to the PhD requirements, but instead could be substituted for existing requirements. Students should not be required to take such courses if it is not beneficial to their training and desired goals.

Co-op placements and paid work-integrated learning are ways to give students opportunities to use their skills as historians in a different context, develop different ones, and establish networks that may be useful in securing employment in the non-academic sector. There are at least three co-op programs across the country open to PhD students (Laval, UBC and Carleton), but at this point, only students at Carleton are making significant use of it. At UBC, only students who have achieved candidacy qualify for PhD co-op; i.e. currently, what that means in practice is that they can only do a co-op placement after they have completed the first two years of their program. Departments and students may want to consider Mitacs fellowships – these are paid internships at organizations that need graduate student expertise. The funding starts at \$10 000 for a four-month internship. The student, the supervisor and the community organization usually need to develop the proposal together, although there are also open projects in which an organization advertises for someone with particular expertise.<sup>23</sup>

Pursuing opportunities like co-op and work-integrated learning will extend a student’s program. Given that both are paid work, they should not pose an immediate financial burden, and they stand to equip students with other experiences, skills, and networks that are potentially useful in the non-academic job market. That said, the question of how to address time to completion while at the same time broadening students’ training is not an easy one to answer. Nevertheless, the Task Force supports co-op as one way to address the desire and the need to restructure History PhD programs to train students for jobs beyond the academy. We see it as an option offered to students, not a program requirement all students must complete.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments explore the possibility of establishing an optional PhD Co-Op Program and paid work-integrated learning opportunities with the relevant units on their campuses. Many universities offer their undergraduates co-op opportunities and have offices devoted to doing just that. The personnel there have the contacts and experience to both find placements for students and to help students identify

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<sup>23</sup> More information on Mitacs can be found here: <https://www.mitacs.ca/en>.

their academic skills and translate them into language that will resonate with non-academic employers. Departments should also consider substituting a co-op term or work-integrated learning opportunity for other PhD requirements, such as a course or a field exam.

## **Globalization**

It is increasingly important for graduate students to have international experiences that broaden their understanding of how academic cultures work around the world, and increase their cross-cultural competencies. At francophone universities, many students do a cotutelle, meaning that their PhD is conducted at two universities – one in Quebec, and generally one in France, Belgium or Switzerland. While this is bureaucratically complicated, it has the advantage of students gaining significant international experience. This helps to position them in the international job market. The use of the cotutelle is increasing in the national capital region as well. Other universities including the University of Guelph, McMaster University and The University of Waterloo already have procedures in place for students to do a cotutelle.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments of history work with their universities to establish cotutelle agreements with other universities across the world and where appropriate, encourage their students to take advantage of these opportunities.

## **Language Exam**

Most programs (16 of the 24 programs), require their students to demonstrate knowledge of a second language, usually through an exam. A few others (3) only require it if it is necessary for the field of study. Typically, students must translate a passage of scholarly prose written in another language into English or French.

Language skills are vital for historians – they expand our horizons and give us an important window into other cultures. One problem with abandoning language exams for people who study Canadian history is that many anglophones do not speak or read French well. They lack an understanding of the historiography in French and know little about Québec and other francophone regions of Canada. This is a loss for these historians, for the CHA/SHC and for Canada. For other fields, the languages required sometimes reflect colonial practices and hierarchies. Also, the language exam often seems to be a hoop with little pedagogical value. Some existing language exams are not especially rigorous while others demand significant time and prove to be a stumbling block in the completion of a student's program. If students learn (or know) a second language and use it to conduct research, the results will be evident in the completed dissertation. Some students need to or should be acquiring language skills in languages not taught by their university, and not examined by their department. These are often languages in the global South or Indigenous languages. Our existing language requirements may be acting as a barrier to equity. Many students now require programming languages and departments might want to consider substituting programming requirements in place of language requirements where it is suitable for a student's project.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments rethink the use of their language exam and whether or it is required for specific fields of study and if a language is required, what kind of assessment is appropriate to measure competency.

## **Dissertation**

The dissertation is the most important part of the PhD program. As this report shows, more than 50% of every student's time to completion is dominated by the planning, proposal, research, writing, defending, and revising of the dissertation. In theory, dissertations are expected to take two to three years, but the reality is they often run to four or more years. We need to think about the requirements of the PhD dissertation to address the time to completion problem, but there are other reasons to reconsider the dissertation in its most dominant current form including those that might be considered pedagogical, ethical, epistemological, and political.

Others have argued for making the dissertation requirements more flexible. In their report on the future of the PhD in History that was published by the American Historical Association in 2003, Thomas Bender, Phillip Katz and Colin Palmer urged the profession to consider reducing the scope and length of the dissertation and possibly rethinking its purpose. They argued: "a more diverse pattern of doctoral education and historical careers demands a greater capacity to identify a variety of excellences."<sup>24</sup> In the English language survey conducted by this committee, respondents were strongly in favour (84%) of some sort of change to the dissertation. Of those who wished for change, 77% chose a different form for the dissertation and 23% chose a shorter page count (200 pages or less). In the French language survey, 78% supported some sort of change to the dissertation – of these 87% chose a different form for the dissertation and 12% chose a shorter page count.

Currently, dissertation requirements in Canadian history departments are fairly similar. The dissertation is usually described as an "original contribution to historical knowledge." A majority of programs provide written page number limits or ranges which suggest 400 double-spaced pages (approximately 100 000 words) as a maximum and 200 double-spaced pages (approximately 50 000 words) as a minimum. These word counts distinguish the doctoral dissertation from its junior sibling, the Master's thesis. They also suggest that the dissertation is approximately the same length as most published scholarly monographs.

Most programs require a written proposal or prospectus. This proposal varies in length (anywhere from 12 pages to 50 pages depending on the program) but its contents are uniform: a set of research questions, a historiographical and perhaps theoretical context for those questions, identification of historical evidence, and some sort of statement on methodology. Some include a chapter

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Bender, Philip F. Katz, and Colin A. Palmer, *The Education of Historians for Twenty-First Century* (American Historical Association, 2004), 23.

breakdown and timeline for completion of research and writing. This proposal may or may not be subject to an oral defence but it is always assessed by a committee of faculty (normally 3-5). Most programs also indicate that while students have a core supervisor(s), there are also advisory committees who are there to lend their specific expertise and with whom students meet at least annually in a formal progress meeting.

Program websites are far more detailed and extensive about the dissertation process, reflecting in part some of the changes that these programs have introduced already. Far less is said about the dissertation as a cultural object. The lack of discussion about the dissertation as an object assumes on website readers, especially prospective doctoral students, understand what it means to be “original.” For generations of scholars, to be “original” meant to study a topic or body of evidence not yet covered in existing scholarship and make the case that this new topic was necessary. To this came an emphasis on method, that in practicing history differently, and justifying those practices, a dissertation would meet this threshold of originality. In a postfoundational age of knowledge-making, to be “original” also refers to a return to already-studied topics and historical evidence to offer new ways of understanding these and their significance. For most of the discipline’s academic history, to be “original” has meant to identify “gaps” or “silences” in a scholarly historiography and to frame a dissertation as filling in a void with respect to subject matter, evidence, or practice. All of this is predicated on an assumption that a prospective doctoral student arrives at a website with some level of disciplinary training or at least some broader scholarly understanding of what “originality” connotes in knowledge-making. It also establishes the criteria against which a doctoral student’s proposal and then dissertation will be evaluated, and even how the would-be-student’s application will be judged. The importance of “originality” goes beyond the space it is given on departmental websites.

While there are broad pedagogical, epistemological, ethical, and professional reasons why programs should consider reforms to the dissertation as both an object and as a process, these need to be localized to fit the unique circumstances of each department, especially institutional and governance structures, and departmental resources which constrain what is even possible to do. The CHA has a role to play, including creating a nationwide conversation about the assessment of history PhD dissertations and nurturing a more expansive discussion about the learning objectives that individual programs might consider attaching to the dissertation beyond it being “original.”

Pedagogically the current dissertation model limits how students can demonstrate “originality” and how they are trained to do so. This is true even within traditional scholarly practices. The SSHRC Insight program emphasizes the mobilization of knowledge and the ability to apply scholarly research knowledge and practices to tackle both academic (often called “multidisciplinary,” “interdisciplinary” or “transdisciplinary”) and non-academic questions and problems. How well does the 200-400-page written dissertation published as a PDF prepare a new academic historian to compete in SSHRC competitions? How well does the process prepare a student to work collaboratively with researchers, academic or otherwise, trained in different disciplines? How well does the process prepare them to offer a substantial, well-integrated program of dissemination into a



SSHRC Insight grant proposal that goes beyond “conference papers, journal articles, and a monograph”? Judging by our survey, there is significant interest in having students do collaborative research. In the English language survey 62% agreed and 38% disagreed, while in the French language survey, 76% of respondents agreed and only 24% disagreed. Even the dissertation-as-monograph raises some significant challenges for the graduated PhD student who wishes to publish the book. A 2018 study of academic presses around the English-speaking world, including Canadian, concluded as follows: “The most salient finding was the significant spread of interdisciplinary influences informing or influencing historical work. Interdisciplinarity, or in many cases, multidisciplinary animates a majority of revised history dissertations [published by university presses].”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, there is the clear disconnect that has emerged between how the current hegemonic dissertation model compares and contrasts to how academic historians are now disseminating research. In April 2015, Timothy Gilfoyle pointed out in an AHA *Perspectives on History* blog post that, “Many departments now include historians who engage in different varieties of scholarly work and production that have different types of impact on the discipline and the broader public, require different types of resources, and necessitate different timelines of production. In the end, history as a scholarly discipline is richer for these multiple forms of scholarship.”<sup>26</sup> While he was arguing on behalf of more universities updating their tenure-and-promotion criteria, his insights resonate. Might the dissertation process be a space where doctoral students could also adopt a “form of scholarship” other than the monograph to demonstrate their professional competencies? Graduate students have also noted that, unless pursuing a traditional academic job, dissertations in their current form are of limited value. Students also remark on the accessibility of dissertations to contemporary society, noting that the inaccessibility of long dissertations contributes to the perceived lack of value of history degrees. Given that an overwhelming majority of history PhD students do not end up in academia, should we allow or even facilitate and encourage students to produce a dissertation that would allow them to pursue a wider range of career pathways?

Imagine, for example, a dissertation process in which an internship was not added on to a degree or substituted for a more typical course credit, but was also integrated into the dissertation itself? A monograph would make this difficult unless the work placement was such that the student could pursue the same research questions laid out in the proposal and / or apply the same methodologies and / or analyse the same data. If possible, there is rich potential for demonstrating how to mobilize academic knowledge and practices to answer both academic and non-academic questions. How that would be integrated into the dissertation’s narrative would be an issue for the supervisor(s) and student to work out, but the impact of this kind of experience enriches all involved.

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Pierre V.M. Hérubel, “Bibliographic and Scholarly Considerations of Revised History Dissertations [RD’s] Published by University Presses,” *Publish Research Quarterly* 34 (2018), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Gilfoyle, “The Changing Forms of history,” AHA perspectives on History 1 April 2015 <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2015/the-changing-forms-of-history>

A different model of dissertation, such as a portfolio, could create even more opportunity for the doctoral student to integrate all forms of experiential learning into their capstone project. Portfolio dissertations create more space for scholarly experimentation and emphasize reflexivity on what was learned, how it was learned, and what insights could be applied to future learning. Portfolio options already exist within a number of Canadian universities for graduate work, and there is a scholarly literature about best practices. Imagine a doctoral student who is able to work with their supervisor or some other mentor(s) on a limited research project and then co-publish a journal article or something else? Why should such work be seen as outside the dissertation even when (or especially when) it is within the dissertation process itself? Perhaps the most exciting options for alternative dissertation forms is coming from digital humanities, including work by digital historians. There is much to consider, for example, in the dissertation models discussed in Virginia Kuhn and Anke Finger's edited volume, *Shaping the Digital Dissertation: Knowledge Production in the Arts and Humanities* (2021). Most important, however, is to consider other ways that students might mobilize their research beyond the 200-400-page monograph, to create spaces that allow them to establish credentials that allow them to pursue professional lives beyond the university campus. This can reinvigorate the pedagogy of the dissertation and expand what "original" can and ought to be. These kinds of projects might also better prepare students for workplaces outside of academia, where they will be doing other sorts of knowledge creation including (potentially) policy briefs, podcasts, museum panels, historical plaques, environmental scans etc.

How might we think about the dissertation in the wider context of the Indigenization/decolonization initiatives currently unfolding in Canadian universities? This question speaks to epistemological assumptions that underpin "originality" and the structures associated with the history dissertation process – committees of university-approved academic experts, archives, and sole-authored monographs among others. In the March 2022 issue of the *Canadian Historical Review*, Crystal Fraser and Allyson Stevenson addressed the ways in which History as both an academic discipline and also a profession that transcends the academy, have historically contributed to the practices and normalization of colonialism that include but also go beyond residential schools. While acknowledging work that has been done to address this, they also rightly point out how little has changed structurally within the discipline and profession. "We argue that it is the responsibility of all history departments and historians to actively engage in reconciliation by scrutinizing our deep-seated beliefs about what history should be and for whom and consider how these actions relate to our research and teaching."<sup>27</sup> The dissertation remains very much a microcosm of the academic profession, and yet in its commitment to "originality" could be a space and process to introduce real structural change. This includes changing the form of the dissertation - digital communication tools, for example, might allow for a more culturally appropriate and effective mode of storytelling and knowledge mobilization through sound, image, performance, and written word. Increasingly, departments are changing their T&P documents to reflect the importance of community-engaged

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<sup>27</sup> Crystal Gail Fraser and Allyson Stevenson, "Reflecting on the Foundations of Our Discipline Inspired by the TRC: A Duty to Respond during This Age of Reconciliation," *Canadian Historical Review* 103, 1 (March 2022), 2.

research and alternative forms of research dissemination, but in most cases, this has not filtered down to the dissertation.

There are also significant ethical dimensions of dissertation reform closely related to epistemological considerations. Consider, for example, how “dissertation committees” might be composed, especially when Indigenous or other “community-based” knowledges / ways of knowing are shared with a researcher. If interested, might someone identified as an Elder, Knowledge Holder, or community member be asked to serve on the committee (and appropriately remunerated for doing so) that approves the research from the proposal to dissertation defence stages? Or perhaps the student is required to disseminate their research not as an appendix to the dissertation process but as a valued, integrated, and thus credited component? While this could include a range of public historical options, it might also be more explicitly academic-oriented things such as the making of teaching materials (including an academic lecture) appropriate for a high school or university classroom located within the territory of a community about whom and / or with whom a doctoral student studied or a policy brief.

Reforms to the dissertation need to go beyond word and page counts. They also need to address structure if we are to create better opportunities for those who become academics to participate in the most exciting and vibrant forms of knowledge- and culture-making currently occurring. Reforms also need to address structural changes if we are to take more fulsome advantage of the History PhD as the beginning of a professional life practicing history in a wide range of careers. Graduate students need to be more aware of what hard and soft skills are involved in completing the dissertation so that they can translate these as outcomes of their work to non-academic hiring committees. Finally, there is a role for dissertation reform to contribute to the decolonization of both universities and the profession. As in all reforms, though, the goal must be to create the necessary structure and provide the necessary supports for students to complete their PhD degrees within a funded window. None of this is easy work, and it is admittedly unsettling. It will also need to be localized, and in this regard the CHA/SHC has a key role to play to supporting reform in the long-term.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments think through the dissertation as an object and as a process. This might include creating space for DH projects, community-based knowledges and ways of knowing, internships, creative projects etc.

**RECOMMENATION:** Departments should ensure that their expectations for the dissertation align with their learning outcomes for their PhD programme.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Departments might want to consider urging students, especially those who do not intend to pursue academic jobs, to complete shorter dissertations

**RECOMENDATION:** Departments should consider processes for allowing community members to serve as examiners in certain situations.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Departments should also ensure that their T&P documents acknowledge the value of community-based research and different types of research dissemination, as these documents have an impact on how we train PhD students.

### **Supervisory Practices**

A PhD in history can be a long and lonely process. Unlike in the sciences, where students are part of a lab, history students often spend much of their time working alone in libraries, archives or in their homes. Contact with supervisors can be infrequent. While most supervisors are attentive to their students' needs, the heavy workload of faculty members means that some find it impossible to keep up with the demands. In our survey, we heard many complaints about supervisors who failed to return drafts in a timely fashion or lacked clear expectations for students. Many supervisors are so fully steeped in the culture of academia that they do not think to teach students about the unwritten rules and assumptions that underline so many academic processes. This might include things like what are faculty looking for when they are evaluating seminar participation, how hiring processes work, how to ask for letters of recommendation etc. Some departments and/or universities require students and supervisors to have regular progress meetings. At Laval, there is a "plan de collaboration" which is completed by the student and supervisor outlining roles and responsibilities. While many universities have a supervisory committee in place, at UQAM every student is co-supervised, which helps ensure accountability. Our task force sees a lot of advantages to co-supervision or to supervisory committees that involve the active participation of every person on the committee. Supervisors are not always available for reasons beyond their control and different supervisors can offer very different teachings on how to do research, writing, navigating the complex world of academia and providing expertise on the world beyond the academy. Graduate students frequently say that they need more support from their departments – providing co-supervisions or actively involved committees is one way or doing this. Departments could also think about providing every incoming PhD student with a more senior student mentor.

Some universities require supervisors to hand back drafts of student work in a specific period of time. At the University of Guelph, for example, the graduate calendar suggests that comments to students "should be returned to the student within two weeks" although it makes allowances for absences from campus or unusually heavy workloads. It also suggests that advisors be "reasonably accessible" to students. They suggest that this might vary according to discipline or stage of research but say that an Advisor must be in contact with the student often enough that they can make an informed judgement on the student's progress every semester.

We also encourage students and their supervisors to take advantage of the growing number of resources being offered across the university. Supervisors themselves often lack expertise on how to network outside of academia, how to communicate the skills learned in a PhD program to employers outside of the university, or how to achieve work-life balance. But more and more universities are offering a range of programs to graduate students. One of the most comprehensive appears to be Concordia's GradProSkills program, which offers workshops in career development, communication, language training, leadership and management and wellness and life balance among others.<sup>28</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** That every department outline expectations of the advisory relationship for faculty and students. This might include deadlines for returning student work, providing lists for field exams, the frequency of meetings for field preparation etc.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That departments ensure that every student is co-supervised or has an involved committee with that involvement described, if not prescribed.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That supervisors, grad directors and students make themselves aware of the resources across campus to enhance PhD training.

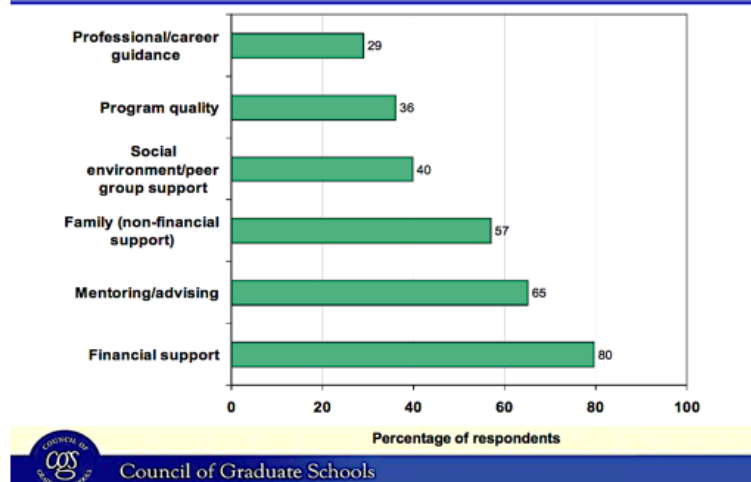
The literature on “best practices” in graduate supervision suggests that good supervisory relationships are associated with higher completion rates and faster times to completion.<sup>29</sup> But most of the existing literature deals with supervision in the sciences. A study by the Council of Graduate Schools found that funding, high quality mentoring/advising and family were the most important in degree completion. While good quality mentoring/advising depends on the needs of the individual student, graduate supervisors need to have the time to do this properly. Some departments recognize extensive graduate supervision through point systems that allow people with large numbers of graduate students to get out of some undergraduate teaching. While this helps to rectify inequalities in workload it could also incentivize taking on too many PhD students and risks devaluing undergraduate teaching.

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<sup>28</sup> Grad Pro Skills, <https://www.concordia.ca/students/gradproskills.html>

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Skaraksis-Doyle and Gayle McIntyre, *Western Guide to Graduate Supervision* (London: Teaching Support Centre Purple Guides, 2008), 1.

### Factors Contributing to Degree Completion: Per Successful Students



**RECOMMENDATION:** We recommend that departments think carefully about the processes by which they assess and reward graduate supervision. While it is helpful to recognize the workload involved in supervising graduate students, we need to be careful about systems that encourage supervisors to take more students than they can appropriately supervise.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Departments also need to think carefully about the number of PhD students they admit and the motivations of these students for completing a PhD given the lack of academic jobs.

As we outlined at the beginning of this report, many PhD programs in Canada are extremely small. This means that students have very little opportunity to learn from other students in their program, and/or to discuss the challenges and opportunities of pursuing a PhD. The Canadian Society for the History of Medicine has very successful groups (one in French, one in English) for PhD students and early career scholars to discuss chapters in progress. Graduate students identify a lack of support, particularly in the later (post-candidacy) stages of their program. This stage of the program aligns with students completing independent research and writing and often signals the end of the cohort experience, even in programs large enough to develop cohorts. This lack of support exists in many dimensions (financial, supervisory/administrative, etc) but it is also a function of a lack of peer support for students to discuss ideas/issues in their research and writing processes, encourage progress/collaboration, share skills/dissemination knowledge developments, and emotional support for student well-being.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the CHA continue to host professional development webinar series that allow students, especially those from smaller programs, to network with

other students from across the country. The CHA might also want to consider creating on-line reading/writing groups based on language and area of study for students to share and improve their work. Students also need to be encouraged to participate in these groups.

## **Appendix 1: Learning Outcomes**

By the end of a PhD program in history, graduates should be able to:

### *Depth and Breadth of Knowledges*

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of methodological approaches in the field of history, by describing how history differs from other disciplines and developing an appreciation of the value of other disciplinary approaches.
- Show a deep and current specialist historical knowledge in a geographic, temporal or thematic area.
- Explain changes in the field of history over time in terms of the subjects being studied, the sources used, the methodologies employed, and the theoretical frameworks being applied.
- Comprehend the disciplines' traditions, its role in colonialism, and the ways that the discipline of history can function to maintain hierarchies of power.

### *Research and Scholarship*

- Identify and describe a range of research methodologies.
- Select, define, and use an appropriate research methodology.
- Conduct historical research at an advanced level.
- Produce knowledge worthy of publication and communication. This could include museums, public policy papers, "grey" material for community organizations etc, recognizing that historical knowledge is produced for a variety of audiences.

### *Application of Knowledge*

- Contribute to the development of academic or professional skills, techniques, tools, practices, ideas, theories and approaches. This might include digital history techniques, new ways of conducting oral histories and original approaches to interpreting archival materials.
- Collaborate with others in the university context and beyond.
- Recognize and articulate hard and soft skills developed during their PhD programme.

### *Communication*

- Engage articulately in dialogue about historical knowledge and research with academic and non-academic audiences
- Compose different kinds of historical writing for different purposes and audiences.
- Communicate complex and/or ambitious ideas, issues, and conclusions.

### *Awareness of the Limits of Knowledge*

- Appreciate the limitations of the field of history, and demonstrate an awareness of other academic and cultural ways of knowing the past.

*Professional Capacity and Autonomy*

- Exercise personal responsibility and autonomous initiative in complex situations, including devising a research project, responding to challenges as they arise, and working with research stakeholders such as fellow historians, archivists, community groups, or other partners.
- Engage respectfully with colleagues, students, and non-university collaborators in a way that helps create an inclusive and equitable intellectual community.
- Identify and respond to the ethical dimensions of historical research, scholarship, and teaching.

**Appendix 2: Graph of Employment Outcomes – see attached.**

**Appendix 3: Bird's Eye View of History Program Requirements**



## Appendix 3

**Employment of History PhD Graduates in Canada, September 2016-August 2022, as of August 2022, n=562**

