



Student Financial Assistance

Case for Support

Context

Completing a university degree is the aspiration of countless young South Africans, enthused with the hope of making an impactful contribution to our fast developing region. The challenge of funding this lifelong asset is one that the *University of Cape Town* (UCT) has committed itself to, ensuring that no student will be turned away simply on the basis of financial need. We endeavour to optimise this opportunity through more financial assistance programmes for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

In the context of a rapidly changing higher education climate in South Africa, and uncertainty about government funding, UCT aims to strengthen its resource capacity through widening its donor support. While much uncertainty prevails around annual fee increases, and the inability of students to meet these rising costs, the need to provide more tertiary study opportunities for our youth cannot be ignored. Due to financial stresses on families, especially those from middle to low income households, many of our promising students cannot gain access to university or have to abandon their studies and follow compromised career paths. The potential contribution that these innovative minds can bring to renewing social, political and economic systems is therefore lost.

Undergraduate Bursaries

Bursary programmes at UCT are structured as comprehensive support packages that cater not only for tuition and residence fees, and learning materials, but also consider the psycho-social needs that students bring to a new learning environment. Bursaries therefore make allowance for mentoring and tutoring facilities, career pathing, as well as health and wellness. An undergraduate bursary is therefore estimated at an average cost of approximately R140,000 per student per year. Bursary donors collaborate with UCT's *Student Financial Aid Office* in setting up the criteria and selection of candidates, as well as in receiving regular feedback on the progress of students throughout their university career.

Postgraduate Bursaries

Given the critical shortage of postgraduate qualifications in South Africa and the need to produce more specialists to increase the knowledge base of our region, the *University of Cape Town* (UCT) aims to attract a larger number of postgraduate candidates for study. Since many outstanding students do not have the financial capacity to pursue honours, masters or doctoral degrees, the need often outweighs the limited resources that the University can provide. Postgraduate bursary programmes at UCT are also structured as comprehensive support packages, responding to students' needs for support with academic fees, residence fees, research costs, and essential living expenses.

Honours' Bursaries

An important element in the measurement of a country's economic stability and potential is the production of postgraduate qualifications. Without an Honour's degree, students cannot study for

a Master's degree leading to the PhD degree. An Honour's degree is therefore considered the gateway to postgraduate study and to a specialised qualification. The programme is a one-year intensive degree, built around two academic semesters, constituting coursework as well as a research project. The average comprehensive cost of an Honours bursary, across all faculties, is calculated at approximately R150,000.

Masters' Bursaries

The programme for a Master's degree is usually built around two to three years of intensive study, where a student has chosen a particular field of study to specialise in. It consists of both coursework and a mini-dissertation, or full dissertation without coursework, centred around the findings of supervised research. The cost of a Master's programme varies across faculties due to the specific research requirements of each discipline. An average estimate is set at approximately R165,000 per student per year.

Doctoral Bursaries

The *Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAF)* reveals that we currently produce only about 26 doctoral graduates per million, which is a relatively low figure compared to the levels of countries such as Turkey (48), Brazil (52), Korea (187) or USA (201). In light of this dearth of PhD graduates, South Africa faces the challenge of needing to massively grow its number of professionals with the necessary expertise and skills that underpin the modern knowledge economy. PhD programmes consist of three to five years of intensive study and supervised research, with an average comprehensive cost estimated at R180,000 per student per year.

Gap Student Fees Funding

The *National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)* currently provides tertiary study loans to students with a total family income up to R350,000, providing opportunities for students from disadvantaged and impoverished circumstances to pursue university study. The recent announcement from national government regarding free tertiary education means that these will no longer be loans that students have to pay back when they start working, but rather financial allowances for students within the same family income threshold. While this is a significant step forward in widening access to universities, it only applies to students registering in 2018 and returning students still have loans that they will have to pay back. There is also a large cohort of students who are beyond this threshold but still cannot afford to fund ever-increasing student fees. Such students come from families whose annual gross income is higher than R350,000 but due to multiple financial commitments for families and the need to cater for a number of siblings, the possibility of self-funding their studies is remote.

The *University of Cape Town* has therefore undertaken to provide funding for students whose annual family income is between R350,000 and R600,000. These 'gap students' are therefore able to receive assistance on a sliding scale, based on their family income within this bracket. Partial funding assistance from donors is essential to support gap student funding, with contributions that range from R20,000 to R100,000.

Student Fee Debt Assistance

Since many of our students at the *University of Cape Town (UCT)* are from poorly resourced communities, assistance is provided to access support from bursaries and scholarships. Not all of these provisions are able to cater for the comprehensive costs of student living and while partial sponsorship of tuition and residence is a welcome support, they still bear the challenge of funding ancillary costs. As a result, many students find themselves in financial debt and while they are academically eligible to continue in their study programmes, historical student fee debt still needs

to be reconciled. UCT is reliant on donors to consider partnering with us to assist students who face the risk of not completing their studies due to historical student fee debt. In many instances, these outstanding fees range from around R10,000 to R100,000 per student.

Partnership of Support

The *University of Cape Town* is grateful for the strong relationship of support that has been established with various donors who have helped increase our offering to students on all levels of study. Such support has facilitated the practice of targeted recruitment, the removal of barriers to learning, and the provision of broad-based support that encourages students to complete their degrees and graduate within a minimum time-frame. The following table summarises the bursary allowances per student per year of study:

Undergraduate Bursaries	R140,000
Honours' Bursaries	R150,000
Masters' Bursaries	R165,000
Doctoral Bursaries	R180,000
Gap Student Fees Funding	R20,000 – R100,000
Student Fee Debt Assistance	R10,000 – R100,000

During these challenging times of reduced government spending on higher education institutes, donor support has become all the more critical to sustain the work of university academia and student development.