

Private Funding for Faculty of Education Graduate Students

The following document, commissioned by the Faculty of Education Dean's Advisory Committee for Research (DACR), is meant to serve as a resource for the DACR and the Faculty as a whole as they consider the pursuit of private donor funding for graduate students. The Faculty has decided to consider private funding for graduate students because: UBC-level graduate funding is limited; not all graduate students are eligible for federal grants (namely, non-resident students); and, the government of BC, unlike some other provinces, does not offer graduate funding opportunities. It is imperative that in any decisions it makes, the Faculty uphold UBC's core values: *academic freedom; advancing and sharing knowledge; excellence; integrity, mutual respect, and equity; and public interest* (www.ubc.ca/about/vision-values.html). This document is intended to articulate the potential risks of private funding, and to stimulate further, in-depth discussion amongst members of the Faculty about this issue. The primary issues identified are the need for a clear gift acceptance policy that can articulate ethical guidelines for determining appropriate donors, and the need to safeguard the integrity and value of critical scholarship. The paper is organized as follows: I first introduce the context of growing private funding in higher education. Then, I offer a review of research in this area by identifying several issues that should be kept in mind by DACR and the Faculty as they weigh the possibilities and risks of private funding. Finally, I present a series of potential options for how this work might be (re)framed.

Summary of the Landscape and Scholarly Debates

Over the past 30 years, funding from non-governmental/private organizations for higher education (e.g. sponsored research, building projects, endowed chairs) has significantly increased. This has been framed as part of a larger shift toward the privatization of higher education/declining public funding (Ball, 2010; 2012; Bok, 2003), and movement toward a more entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2008). Although university collaboration and resource-seeking from private sources, including industry, non-profits, and philanthropic foundations, is not a new phenomenon (Lowen, 1997), recent growth has been driven by intensified government pressure for universities to contribute more directly to local and national economic growth, and institutional pressure for individual academics and departments to diversify their funding sources (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Metcalfe (2010) finds that the Canadian context is no exception to these trends. That said, at no point is the pursuit of private funding inevitable; doing so (and doing so in any particular way) is always a choice, even when perceived as a pragmatic imperative, as pragmatism often obscures and depoliticizes more complex realities, choices, and conflicts (Burlandy et al, 2016; Newfield, 2016).

Given the risks involved with private funding, and the resources that go into establishing and managing these relationships, it is important to consider who benefits and how, and to take account of both foreseen and unforeseen potential outcomes (Bozeman, Fay, & Slade, 2013). There is a range of views about private funding for higher education. Some argue that any amount (particularly from for-profit organizations) compromises the public mission of the university and the unencumbered pursuit of knowledge, and instead suggest that the primary need is to advocate for renewed public/governmental funding. At the same time, no source of funding is entirely neutral, as public funding also comes with

its own expectations about service to a fairly defined vision of the public good. Others emphasize the practical necessity of pursuing private funding. Among the latter group, there is a growing emphasis on proactive study, management, and minimization of potential risks and conflicts of interest (both individual and institutional) through clear policies and procedures (Fulop & Couchman, 2006; Harman & Sherwell, 2002; Resnik, 2007), including in the context of Canada specifically (Baird, 2003). Indeed, regardless of one's perspective, there is a general consensus around the need for robust ethical guidelines for private partnerships. Schwarz (1991) describes this as a “‘preventive medicine’ approach” to ensure integrity (p. 757). At the same time, there is recognition that even this will not reduce the risk of compromised research to zero (Brisbois et al., 2016). Thus, while set guidelines are important and valuable, there is also a need for ongoing, open-ended, and transparent oversight and evaluation of existing partnerships.

Research Funding and Philanthropy

Some of the primary ethical issues identified in private funding for research are:

- Public accountability and transparency
- Funder motivations (e.g. direct profit; indirect profit; political)
- Level of public investment in private development (private knowledge being subsidized by public funds)
- Public/private access to knowledge produced through funded research
- Un/equal distribution of benefits from research
- Affordability of/access to products, services, treatments developed in funded research
- Funder influence in awards and student selection processes
- Funding biased towards applied research
- Research biased towards what can be funded (e.g. is critical research ‘fundable’?)
- Externalized costs of the research*

I will examine several of these issues in further depth in the discussion below, in particular those that are most likely to affect funding for Education research.

Until now, much private research funding has primarily been oriented toward STEM fields, in some ways disadvantaging social science and humanities fields in the new landscape of resource competition. Thus, much existing research about private funding emphasizes university-industry collaboration in STEM research. Important lessons can be learned from these experiences, but the specific needs, concerns, and practices of education researchers should ultimately drive the decisions of the UBC Faculty of Education (see Appendix 1 for review of the ethical orientations and concerns of different disciplinary areas). Much private funding for STEM comes from corporate/industry firms who sponsor applied research about potentially profit-generating products, treatments, or innovations (Lee & Miozzo, 2015; Thune, 2009). Bozeman et al. (2013) describe this as “property-focused research”, which they contrast with “knowledge-focused research.” Because of this, many in STEM acknowledge that private funding influences researchers’ choice of topic, as in many ways this is precisely the intention behind the choice to fund it, even as there remains a stated commitment to ensuring academic integrity and

autonomy in the research itself (Harman, 2001). Private funding for education research may be less likely to be *directly* oriented toward producing knowledge for profit. In addition to the wealth of research about private funding for STEM, there is a growing body of work about this issue in the field of (global) public health. The strong public good emphasis of this field means there are significant parallels with education in terms of risks faced, particularly in relation to potential conflicts between profit-oriented and public interests. Richter suggests the need for “clear and effective institutional policies and measures that put the public interest at centre stage in all public–private interactions” (as cited by Hernandez-Aguado & Zaragoza, 2016, p. 8). Hernandez-Aguado and Zaragoza (2016) found that while considerable scholarly literature supports public-private health partnerships, there is little concrete proof that these partnerships result in positive health outcomes, and therefore advocate the need for public health researchers and practitioners to play a stronger role in framing these partnerships. In one example of this framing, Galea and McKee (2014) offer five ‘tests’ for considering a public-private partnership related to health: 1) “are the core products and services provided by the corporation health enhancing or health damaging?”; 2) to what extent do “corporations put their policies into practice in the settings where they can do so, their own workplaces”?; 3) are their corporate social responsibility activities transparent?; 4) to what extent does the corporation “make contributions to the commons”?; and, 5) is there a robust firewall between policy-makers and the corporation? (pp. 4-5).

In addition to considering the risks of specifically profit-driven private funding, there is a need to assess the risks of philanthropic/donations, and thus, it is instructive to consult research about university fundraising, a centuries old practice (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). The fundraising tradition is stronger in the U.S., but has recently become a targeted focus for Canadian universities as well, particularly the U15 Group. Literature about foundation/philanthropic giving finds that donors motivations exceed altruism and are informed by tax incentives and potential positive public image benefits (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). However, all donor motivations are complex and nuanced, and it is nearly impossible to comprehensively canvass all of them (Bozeman, et al. 2013).

Two well-known examples of philanthropic student funding are the Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) and the MasterCard Foundation Scholars programs, both of which target specific student populations, and start at the undergraduate level, but have different selection processes. The Gates foundation chose GMS students, who applied separately to the academic program of their choice and brought their funding with them, while MasterCard Scholars were chosen through university-wide selection committees at participating partner institutions, including UBC. As with all possible private funding models, there is a need for the Faculty to clearly define how students will be selected. Private giving is generally driven by donor priorities, rather than by a democratically determined vision of the public good (Newfield, 2016). Even if not driven by the *direct* pursuit of profit, donors are unlikely to fund research if they believe it will be critical of them and/or the type of work they do (Resnik, 2007). Conversely, there is a risk that donations may influence research in alignment with the donor’s political and/or personal interests. For instance, some have expressed concern that donor Peter Munk’s politics and

economic ties to resource extraction industries limits critical research conducted and supported by the University of Toronto Munk School of Global Affairs (McQuaig, 2010).

Important Considerations

Below, are a series of considerations and guiding questions to help orient discussions amongst the Faculty about the possibility of developing private partnerships to fund doctoral student scholarships. These were produced out of a synthesis of research and research reviews about the risks and possibilities of private higher education partnerships.

1) Ensuring research autonomy and integrity

Research attests that ensuring that private sponsorship does not interfere in any way with the integrity of free and open inquiry is perhaps the most important consideration in any funding arrangement (Parks & Disis, 2004; Schwarz, 1991). No amount of funds is worth compromising graduate students' ability to determine and disseminate, in consultation with their doctoral committee, their line of research, approach, and argument; and no amount of funds is worth compromising public trust in institutional integrity. This is perhaps most crucial for protecting critical scholarship, particularly if the critique is directed, however indirectly, at the business of the sponsoring organization. In one example of insufficient protection of academic autonomy, a University of Toronto researcher had her pharmaceutical company-funded research terminated after she expressed concern about one of their drugs, and was not supported by the University, which was anticipating a significant donation from the same company (Ginsberg, 2012). In another case, a private company sought to suppress publication of sponsored research of a researcher, and the Brown University medical school that employed him initially supported the company and closed his program. The decision was eventually reversed, but not without significant harm to the school's reputation (Harman & Sherwell, 2002).

- *Guiding questions:* What is the best way to structure private funding to ensure researchers' full academic autonomy and scholarly integrity, with regard to all elements of research design, approach/method, and dissemination? What mechanisms should be put into place to ensure and monitor this? Should donors be permitted to fund students in specific areas of research (e.g. charter schools, Indigenous education), and if so, how could it be assured that, within this broad scope, students will have autonomy? What are the potential effects of the fact that there are more likely to be interested donors for certain projects and not for others?

2) Ethics and selection of private partners

Public research institutions and private organizations (in particular profit-driven ones) have distinct purposes (Bozeman et al., 2013; Davis & Ferreira, 2006). As a part of a public institution, the Faculty is charged to ensure that its partnerships will broadly serve the public good. This includes consideration about whether partnering with a specific funder upholds or compromises the public good mission of the university. The Faculty could develop a set of guiding ethical principles, and establish a standing review committee or other oversight mechanism, to research and make decisions about possible funders. Presumably, these guidelines must meet though may exceed the UBC "Corporate Strategic Partnership Guidelines" (2007). According to the UBC guidelines, "When assessing a potential partner, the University will, at a minimum, hold a

corporation to the local legal standards of each jurisdiction in which it carries on business.” However, more rigorous assessments and standards should be developed by the Faculty for partner selection, for instance with due consideration to the funder/donor’s mission (e.g. politically partisan), their business/focus (e.g. arms manufacturers), and their actual practices (e.g. labour practices) (Galea & McKee, 2014; Sandford, Pache, & Gautier, 2016). This may be done in consultation with the Faculty Development office, but the oversight committee should have independence in issuing its recommendations. The Faculty may also include ethical conduct statements in contracts with partners. For instance, at Queens University: “The statement as noted defines the university's essential values and makes it explicit that the university will not accept external support that compromises these values or the university's commitment to its academic mission” (www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senate/queens-relationship-corporate-sector/policy-framework-productive-partnership)

- *Guiding questions:* By what guidelines will the Faculty determine which funders are appropriate partners? How can the Faculty ensure that its partnerships are mutually advantageous? Who will be charged with assessing potential partners and making the final determinations? How will assurances about ethical expectations be formally built into negotiations and agreements with potential sponsors? What is the procedure for changing an existing determination if those expectations are violated?

3) Student selection

Private funding imperatives should in no way affect the selection procedures of Departmental admissions committees in the Faculty. Student recipients of private funds should be selected on their merit and potential contributions, broadly defined according to measures determined by the deciding body/committee, rather than on their alignment with a particular funder’s ideological position or line of inquiry. Regardless of how the structure of funding might be organized, the authority to select students to receive scholarships should be clearly designated. Determination needs to be made about what input, if any, funders will have. Were students to be selected directly by funders and/or by the UBC fundraising staff, this could potentially compromise their research autonomy and integrity, and the merit-basis of the decision. From the outset it should be clear what kind of relationship funders are permitted to have with sponsored students. Students should be thoroughly informed of these rules and regulations, and their continued funding should not be contingent on donor approval of their research.

- *Guiding questions:* How should scholarship recipients be selected? Will funders fund an individual student or contribute to one large fund to be dispersed amongst multiple students by the Faculty and/or Departments? What are the guidelines in place to address the possibility that a donor might wish to contact student beneficiaries of their funds? Are there any conditions placed on students’ continued funding, beyond academic achievement and proof of steady progress through their program? Will funders have any proprietary claim on the research of students they fund?

4) Long-term effects of private funding

Apart from protecting the academic autonomy of funded students, mechanisms should also be in place to ensure funders do not influence the research agenda or business of the students’ advisors and/or the Faculty as a whole. Even with ethical measures and

firewalls in place around direct influence on the students receiving private funds, there is a risk that opening the door further to private funding will have significant and potentially unforeseen/indirect effects. For instance, it may lead to the naturalization of minimal/declining public or institutional funding for graduate research, as well as of the perception that ‘there is no turning back’ once the move toward privatization begins (Newfield, 2016). Further, the perceived necessity to attract or pursue private funding may lead the Faculty as a whole, and/or individual faculty members, to “self-censor”, particularly in relation to critical perspectives (Gray & Kendzia, 2009). This censoring can affect not only the framing or approach to research or its dissemination, but also the choice of particular research topics over others (Brisbois, et al., 2016). Conversely, movement toward a private-funding model may result in the devaluation of the scholarly contributions of faculty members whose research is not ‘fundable’ by private donors. The Faculty should also consider the potential precedent of its shifting funding models, not just at UBC but in other Education schools, particularly given the Faculty’s position as a global leader. Finally, being too dependent on any one source of revenue for student funding can be risky and leave the Faculty vulnerable to undue influence. The Faculty might therefore consider putting into place a policy that limits the percentage and/or amount of revenue that can be received from any particular funding source type (i.e. private funding) and/or from a particular funding organization. For instance, the World Wildlife Federation caps the funding it accepts from corporate sources, while Greenpeace accepts zero corporate philanthropy (Sandford, Pache, & Gautier, 2016).

- *Guiding questions:* What is the ideal mix of the total funding for Education graduate students? Who will determine this mix? How will it be achieved? How might acceptance of private funding shape the future funding landscape for Education, at the level of the Faculty, the university, the province, and even the country? How will the Faculty ensure that critical scholars, and others will difficult-to-fund research, will not be punished (e.g. in tenure and promotion processes) for not receiving funding?

5) Clarity, transparency, and oversight

Communications about any decision to accept private funding should be thoughtfully developed, with particular concern for clarity and full transparency, so as to assure and ensure the continued integrity of and trust in Faculty research for various constituencies, including fellow scholars and the public at large (Miller et al., 2014). As Schwarz (1991) notes, even the perception that research integrity has been compromised can be damaging for an individual’s research or even an entire program. Williams-Jones and MacDonald (2008) also note that often official policies around, for example, conflicts of interest are written in legalistic language that is not very accessible, is oriented toward avoiding institutional liability, and emphasize prohibitions rather than constructive guidance. Further, even when policies, principles, and procedures are put into place, there is a need for ongoing oversight to not only assess whether/how these are functioning as intended, but to also address unforeseen issues or concerns. This may, for example, take the form of a permanent oversight committee with rotating appointments, with regularly scheduled assessments as well as the charge to meet on an as-needed basis as issues arise.

- *Guiding questions:* How will final Departmental decisions about private funding be made? How will these decisions be communicated internally, and to the public? Which bodies will hold the responsibility and authority for oversight of private

funding agreements? On what schedule or according to what imperatives will this oversight body convene for assessments? How will their autonomy be guaranteed?

Summary of Possible Frameworks for Private Donors for Doctoral Students

Option	Benefits	Risks	Variants/Questions
1: Multiple private funders contribute to a single scholarship fund, for accepted doctoral students to the Faculty, researching any subject; Faculty adjudicates recipients.	With no individual designated as the recipient of a particular funder’s contribution, this could minimize risks of compromising research integrity.	Funders may strongly prefer having names attached to a specific scholarship (and thus, student); spreading funds could spread risks of influence/conflicts to the Faculty as a whole.	Funding could go to a set number of students and/or be used to “top up” or “match” existing funding offers/opportunities.
2: Individual private funders fund scholarships for students researching specific research <i>subject</i> ; Faculty adjudicates recipients.		Strong potential for students to feel pressure to represent funder and/or funder’s position on said subject in a positive light; only certain kinds of research will attract \$	Would students be considered for these scholarships prior to, concurrently with, or after, their program application process?
3: Individual private funders fund a particular <i>student</i> (or students), and their proposed project.	If funder is an individual, they may feel more inclined to fund if they can feel a ‘connection’ with a particular student and their project.	Strong potential for students to feel pressure to represent funder (and/or their business) in a positive light.	Who selects the students – funder, faculty, both? Would students be considered before, during, after UBC application?
4: No private funding for students pursued by the Faculty.	Risk of research integrity compromised by private interests is reduced to zero	If public funding declines or even stagnates, there may be few funding sources for graduate students; this would not apply to existing private funding streams (e.g. GMS)	How do decisions at the Faculty relate to graduate funding mandates from the University?

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Appendix: Funding ethics orientations

	STEM	Health	Social Sciences	Arts and Humanities
Orientation	Commercialization	Humanitarian (public health)/ Commercialization (medicine)	Improvement of social and economic indicators	Philanthropy (human flourishing and heritage)
Common scenario	Product research and development	Treatment research and development	Policy and practice research and development	Archive research, preservation, public engagement
Understanding of “public good”	Innovation Scientific progress Capacity building Economic growth Alignment of public and private good	Better health outcomes Scientific progress	Better social and economic indicators Evidence based policies and practices	Intellectual progress and diversity Questioning received wisdom Alternative ways of thinking
Potential conflicts related to academic autonomy	Intellectual property ownership, control of process, liabilities	Information disclosure public vs private accountability Inconvenient data	Ideological conflicts Unfavorable interpretations of data Bias in favor of empiricism	Critiques of status quo Raising ethical issues about economic rationalizations
Management	COI agreements	COI agreements Gift acceptance policies	COI agreements Gift acceptance policies	COI agreements Gift acceptance policies