



UNIVERSAL

EXTENSION

EXTENSION

UNIVERSAL

REVERSE

TOWN HALL

Reports & Notes

June 12, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS

TABLE OF

- 3** [Preface & Acknowledgments](#)
- 4** [Introduction](#)
- 5** [Universal Extension Platform](#)
- 8** [Timeline of Universal Extension Campaign](#)
- 9** [NYU COVID Coalition](#)
- 10** [Flaws of Existing Plans](#)
- 11** [#NYUCanAffordIt Part 2](#)
- 17** [Testimonials](#)
- 22** [Conclusion](#)
- 23** [Q&A](#)
- 27** [Appendix](#)

Have questions, feedback or ideas? Want to get involved? Get in touch with us!

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREFACE &

On June 12, 2020, members of the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC), the graduate student worker labor union at NYU, organized a reverse town hall. **The reverse town hall focused on graduate students' demand for a universal extension of funding packages.** This event provided a space for graduate student workers to share their concerns and visions, and for invited administrators to listen. While we were pleased by the presence of many department faculty, including those in Director of Graduate Studies and Chair positions, we were disappointed that not a single Dean, Board of Trustees Member, or upper-level administrator attended. In this packet, we have summarized the presentations, testimonials, and research presented at the town hall in the hopes that they will encourage other university community members to join us in calling on NYU for a universal extension!

We want to thank UMass for sharing their experience with organizing a reverse town hall, the graduate workers who generously shared their testimonials in the town hall, the GSOC members who collaborated to bring this town hall together, and the many students, staff, and faculty who took the time to join the conversation.

INTRODUCTIONS

This reverse town hall is intended to be an opportunity for NYU leadership, school deans, professors, and program staff to hear from graduate students across schools and programs about our needs within the context of COVID and the changes it has brought to the university and daily life.

However, before we begin, we want to recognize this moment—we are in the midst of a national uprising whose immediate cause is the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade. These recent and publicized murders represent the latest additions to the liturgy of Black people killed by the state. On Wednesday our colleagues went on [#Strike4BlackLives](#) to [#ShutDownAcademia](#) for its role in the perpetuation of white supremacy. The Black Student Union released a powerful [statement](#) calling for divestment from policing and incarceration. Last week the Incarceration to Education Coalition (IEC) and GSOC’s political solidarity committee signed on to [a national letter](#) demanding universities and colleges cut ties to local police departments. We also wrote and circulated an [NYU-specific letter](#) calling for an end to the university’s partnerships and relationships with the NYPD. Police have no place in educational spaces.

We bring this up at this townhall about the need for a universal extension because it is urgent, but also to insist that we will not go back to business as usual. With this convening, we want to enact participatory democracy in the operation of the university. We have a right to a say in the future of our workplace and our education. We have needs that must be met if we are going to continue. We demand a one-year extension.

“We want to enact participatory democracy in the operation of the university. We have a right to a say in the future of our workplace and our education. “

UNIVERSAL EXTENSION PLATFORM

What is a universal extension and why are graduate workers demanding one?

While this campaign has several key demands, the central one is an **extension of graduate workers' stipends and scholarships**. As graduate workers, our stipends are our primary form of income. Almost all Ph.D. students, in addition to some master's students, receive stipends for our research and academic labor at the university —for most of us, our stipends are around \$28,000 for nine months out of the year. According to MIT, a single adult's living wage in NYC is around \$40,000 a year. That means that even under normal circumstances, we make around \$12,000 less than the living wage. While graduate workers receive additional income for specific teaching, research, or administrative appointments, these positions are not guaranteed. It is important to note that NYU, in contrast to most other universities, takes the position that our stipends are not income and that we are only workers when we have a specific teaching, research, or administrative appointment. We reject this. Graduate workers are in many ways the primary researchers and instructors at the universities, and our academic research and labor is work! For this reason, we will continue the fight for universal extension of funding packages in our current bargaining with the university.



Graduate workers are in many ways the primary researchers and instructors at the universities, and our academic research and labor is work!”

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, graduate workers, like workers around the world, have had our personal and working lives completely disrupted. The widespread closures of laboratories, studios, archives, and universities prevent us from conducting research crucial for our dissertations and theses in addition to new caretaking duties. In light of this, graduate workers began organizing in mid-March around the following demands on the next page.

OUR DEMANDS

1 **Provide a one-year extension of funding & time-to-degree deadlines for all graduate students. This includes:**

- a. An additional year for all doctoral and master's students with current NYU funding packages, and a commitment to provide funding for all currently matriculated doctoral students for the 2020-2021 academic year who do not have funding secured.
- b. No additional tuition for master's students who opt-in to degree extensions.
- c. Maintenance of matriculation, registration & services, and health care fee waivers for one additional year for all graduate students.

2 **Provide three-month emergency summer funding proportionate to the academic year fellowship amount.**

3 **Extend I-20/DS-2019 and provide needed funding to all international and immigrant students so that they may maintain their immigration status.**

4 **We make these demands in solidarity with the NYU COVID Coalition demands.**

OUR PRINCIPLES

- 1 **Funding for all! Any funding extension plan must be universal, with no department, cohort, or student excluded.** All graduate students and cohorts have been deeply affected by COVID. As the testimonials of students at various stages of graduate work make clear, all of us have faced and will continue to face serious impediments to the normal completion of our work. We are expected to continue to perform teaching and research labor in the university. We are asking to be paid a living wage for this labor.

2

No passing the buck! Any doctoral funding extension plan must be funded at a university-wide level, not from school or department budgets.

Recently announced plans for (partial) extensions put the onus on individual schools and departments. This will inevitably lead to an unfair, uneven implementation in which only schools and departments that are larger, better funded, and/or sympathetic to student demands will extend funding packages. We reject any plan which is not universal, and which pits schools, departments, and cohorts against each other. In order to ensure a minimum living wage for all, NYU must redistribute funds.

3

No admissions cuts! We oppose admissions cuts because they displace the burden of the crisis onto future graduate students.

Following the 2008 recession, several departments cut admissions to funding current students. Those funding lines permanently disappeared. If current funding extensions are financed by reducing graduate enrollment, departments lose these Ph.D. lines forever, which in turn will lead to cuts in teaching jobs. Smaller departments may collapse entirely. Finally, as with all other austerity measures, admissions cuts allow NYU to extend funding packages without restructuring its finances according to the needs of its community members.

4

NYU can afford it! We reject the austerity measures outlined by NYU's administration.

The university administration has indicated that meeting our demands would necessitate the mass furloughing of other employees. We strongly reject this claim, and the tired managerial tactic of pitting workers against each other. NYU can afford to pay its graduate student workers and other campus workers. NYU can finance these extensions by using its endowment, reallocating the capital expansion funds, and by cutting top administrator salaries (see the proposals in [NYU Can Afford It](#)). We know that the barriers to using those resources are a matter of will rather than ability. NYU has repeatedly forked out the money to finance its development projects and loans to faculty.

5

Protect all of us! We recognize that some of us are affected more than others.

Graduate students of color, women, LGBTQ students, international and immigrant students, and those with dependents have always been more disadvantaged in terms of the ability to dip into savings or turn to rich family members, and are discriminated against in the housing market and in the external funding market. Additionally, NYU is a global institution enriched by its large international student population. At a time when the federal government is using the pandemic to further its anti-immigrant agenda, NYU has a larger responsibility to protect international students by ensuring that they have adequate funding to remain in the USA. A universal extension will ensure that these inequities are not further exacerbated.

TIMELINE OF UNIVERSAL EXTENSION CAMPAIGN

The below timeline represents the collective grassroots organizing that graduate student workers undertook since the start of the COVID pandemic. In mid-March, graduate students released [a public letter](#) calling on NYU's Provost Katherine Fleming to implement a universal extension of funding packages, summer funding equivalent to a living wage, grant tuition refunds to Master's students, and waive maintenance of matriculation and healthcare fees. While Provost Fleming responded to the graduate students who wrote the letter within a day and then indicated that she hoped to have a concrete response on the issues raised "in 7-10 days" from March 31, the majority of graduate student workers still have no guaranteed extension, and there has been no tuition refund.

By early May, confronted by a summer without pay, rank and file graduate student workers organized a three-day sick out to withhold their labor and pressure the university into responding. While those workers did not receive a direct response from the administration, several changes in university policy indicate that the pressure is working: NYU committed to using 100% of CARES Act funding for student aid (as opposed to 50%), GSAS administration allowed departments to create extension plans based on admissions cuts, and Steinhardt and Tisch came up with pools of emergency summer funding that were not previously available.

- 3.19** ● Petition with demands calling for **universal extension distributed** to grad students
- 3.31** ● Letter (with ~ **600 signatures**) sent to Provost Fleming
- 3.31** ● Fleming responds: **"Will respond in 7-10 days" (~700 signatures)**
- 4.10** ● **No response.** A follow up email was sent
- 4.16** ● **No response** from Fleming to follow up email #2
- 4.20** ● Fleming promises to have a response **within 60 days**
- 4.20** ● Departmental **Letters of Support**
- 5.6-8** ● **Rank and File action**
- **WIN!** Cares Act distributed to students
- TODAY** ● No concrete plan for:
 - 1. Universal extension**
 - 2. Summer funding**
 - 3. Matriculation and health care fees**

NYU COVID COALITION: SOLIDARITY & ANTI-AUSTERITY

NYU administration's first strategy when workers ask for what they deserve is to say that it will harm other workers or undergraduate students.

GSOC workers are among the lowest-paid workers on campus, and we are asking only to be paid the bare minimum to survive in this city. But we in GSOC know that the labor of all these workers is integral to running this university, and that their work makes our own work possible. We are fighting for all of us.

We have a long history with some of the campus unions here at NYU. GSOC has been building relationships with other unions and campus groups since before COVID-19. Since the lockdown, GSOC has been amplifying the needs and issues of other workers on campus, and they have supported and amplified ours through the NYU COVID Coalition. We asked some of our fellow unions to take a look at our platform and join us at this reverse town hall. Some of the unions and campus groups we reached out to have already endorsed our demands for a universal extension.

We know that we are about to see a lot more austerity talk from NYU, including threats of layoffs. And still, none of the unions, who together represent over 8000 workers at NYU, are being consulted about plans to reopen NYU. NYU is worried about its tuition and housing revenues, and is doing its best to return to business as usual. We are being told from the top that classes will be in-person in the fall. If we are not ready to teach in-person, we might not have jobs in fall. We are being asked to choose between being healthy and having a job.

What happens if cases spike again in the fall? If we can't open at all in fall, then what is the plan? How does NYU plan to support its students and workers?

Our Endorsements:

GSOC-UAW Local 2110, graduate workers' union at NYU

NYU Young Democratic Socialists of America

NYU Sanctuary Coalition

Law Students for Economic Justice

NYU Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies Graduate Student Organization

NYU Asian American Political Activism Coalition

Media, Culture, & Communication MA Student Association (MASA)

Radical Social Work Collective

Student Labor Action Movement

First-Generation/Low-Income Partnership (FLIP)

Society of Women in Technology NYU (SWITCH)

XR NYU

NYU College Democrats

Roosevelt Network at NYU

MexSA - Mexican Student Association

NYU Graduate Biology Group (GBG)

NYU Biology Respect is a Part of Research (RPR)

Generation Vote at NYU

NYU Arab Student Union

The Plague, NYU's comedy publication

Sunrise Movement at NYU

American Association of University Professors, NYU Chapter (NYU-AAUP)

Governance Council of Minority and Marginalized Students

ACT-UAW Local 7902, the union of adjuncts at NYU and adjuncts and graduate workers at the New School

UCATS Local 3882, the union of clerical, administrative and technical staff at NYU

Organizing Committee, Contract Faculty United (CFU-UAW)

&MANY INDIVIDUALS

From what has happened this year, and how NYU responded to the needs of workers and students, we are not completely sure we can trust NYU to have our interests in mind. Through the NYU COVID Coalition, we managed to put pressure on NYU and get some victories, like PPE for security workers. GSOC is committed to making this coalition stronger, and our coalition partners know this well. We are very grateful to the members of these campus groups and unions who are taking the time to be here in solidarity with us and to tell NYU that we will not fall for their divide and conquer strategy.

FLAWS OF EXISTING PLANS

After over a month of our organizing around a universal extension, we received an email from Provost Fleming on May 1 that listed funding extension plans being offered by different schools (see Appendix). **The most glaring issue with the approach outlined by the email is that the university was not offering a universal solution; instead, the email signaled NYU's plan to leave it up to individual schools to put forward their own plans.** This non-universal approach amplifies existing funding inequalities between schools and increases the risk of graduate students falling through the cracks. We further identified the following problems with the email from the provost:

- The email didn't reference solutions for master's students, who are some of the most affected by the closure of the university due to loss of on-campus job opportunities as well as studio space, equipment, fieldwork opportunities, etc.
- Many schools didn't have plans in place; the email simply linked to contact info in that school (this was true of the Center for Data Science, Global Public Health, Institute of Fine Arts, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, Rory Meyers College of Nursing, Sackler Institute of Biomedical Sciences, Silver School of Social Work, NYU Abu Dhabi, and NYU Shanghai).
 - * This leaves schools to come up with "solutions" for students on a case-by-case basis, which increases the risk of students who need extensions not receiving one, and puts the burden on students to advocate for themselves when the university should be acting to support all of us.
- Some plans (e.g. GSAS) pit departments and cohorts against each other by leaving departments to each devise their own plan for their graduate students, which amplifies existing funding inequalities between departments.
 - * This plan also makes funding extensions dependent on admissions cuts, which run the risk that lines will never be restored to departments, as happened in Performance Studies after 2008.

#NYUCanAffordIt

PART 2

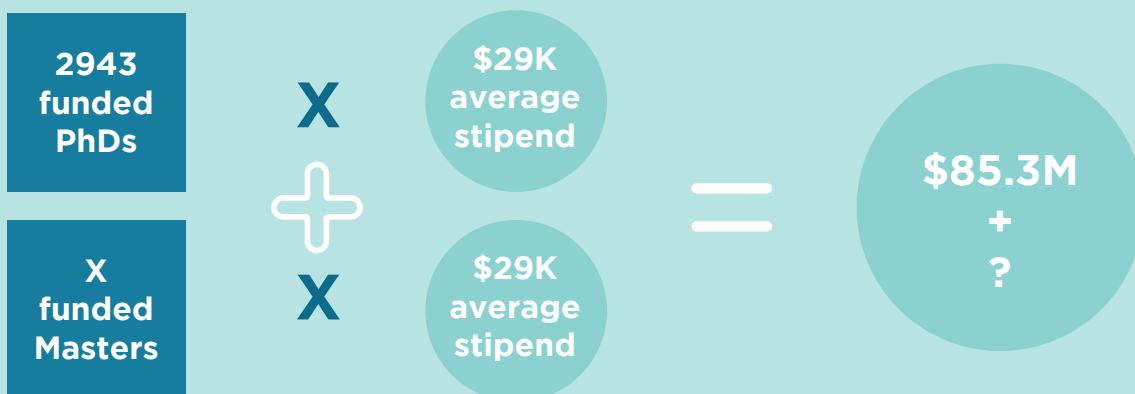
NYUCanAffordIt Part 2 is a continuation of the research previously presented at NYU Can Afford It: A Teach-in, which took place on April 24, 2020, as part of the Virtual Week of Action by NYU COVID Coalition. If you missed Part 1, you can find it [here](#). This is collective research from GSOC’s finances research team.

In NYUCanAffordIt Part 2, we attempt to estimate how much it will cost NYU to grant our demands, and where that money could and should come from. We tried to get these answers from NYU, but we were left to do these calculations on our own. We discovered yet again how little transparency there is about NYU’s budget and simple facts.

Cost of Universal Extension

Demand: An additional year for all doctoral and master’s students with current NYU funding packages.

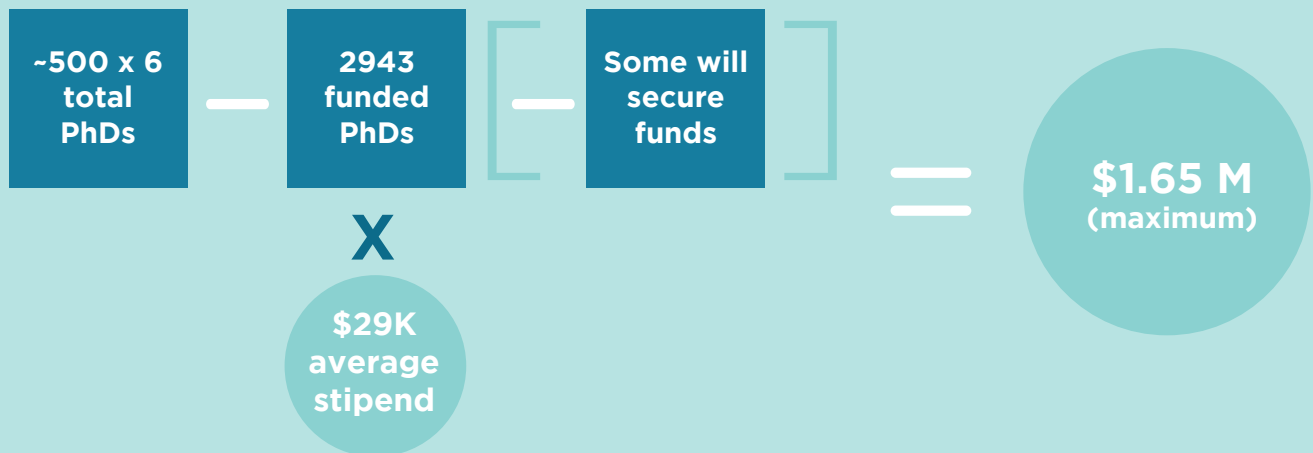
As the following figure shows, we take the usual annual stipends for PhDs and master students to be \$29K. Again, there is no data about this, but this seems like the average amount from our very small crowdsourcing efforts. There are 2943 funded Ph.D. students at NYU across cohorts. This is a figure we learned from friends in the student government. We do not know the figure for funded master students. Neither of these figures, strangely, is available publicly. This would put the cost of this demand at 85.3 Million, plus the unknown amount for masters students.



Demand: A commitment to providing funding for all currently matriculated doctoral students for the 2020-2021 AY who do not have funding secured.

Correction: In the presentation, we presented an incorrect cost for this demand. We said this would cost \$87 Million. The correct amount is \$1.65 Million.

We estimate 500 doctoral students in each cohort based on available [degree conferral data](#) and assume six cohorts. This gives the number of all currently matriculating doctoral students. Take out from this the already funded doctoral students (to avoid double-counting), but we leave in those who will secure external funds to be maximalist in our estimation. This demand will cost NYU \$1.65 Million in AY-2020-21.



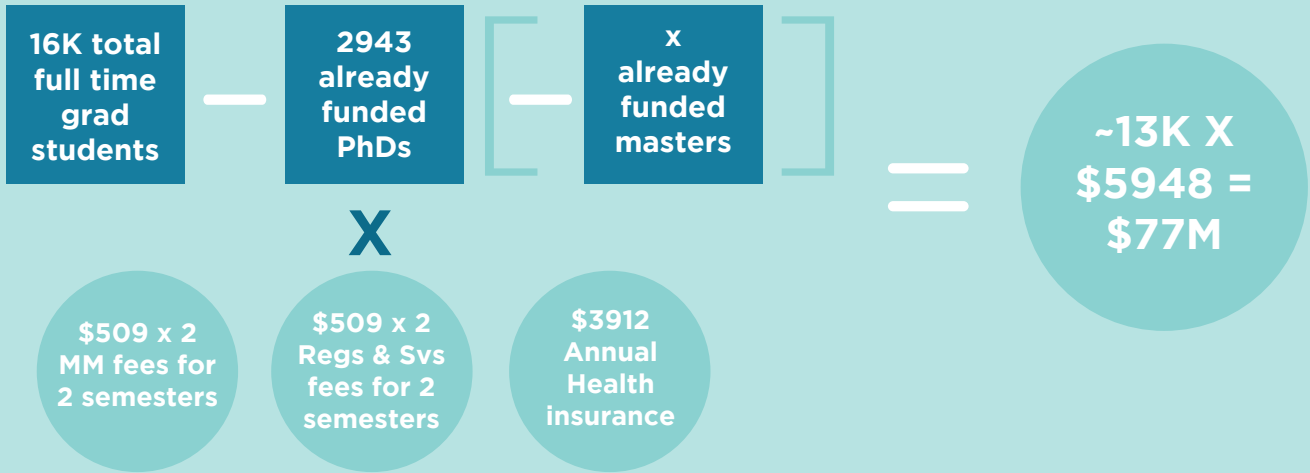
Demand: No additional tuition for master’s students who opt-in to degree extensions.

Masters students did not get what they were promised in Spring 2020. They were not refunded tuition & fees. An additional semester should NOT be factored in as a cost to NYU, since NYU kept the money they owed masters students.

Demand: Maintenance of matriculation, registration & services, and health care fee waivers for one additional year for all graduate students.

Taking the total full-time graduate student population to be 16K, subtracting the

known number of Ph.D. students who already receive these fee waivers, and ignoring that a few master students also have these fees waived, we believe around 13K students should get these fee waivers. The costs of MM and registration and services fees are from bursar bills for GSAS Ph.D. students. The annual health insurance cost is taken from the [student health insurance brochure](#) (2019-2020). The cost for this demand is therefore estimated at \$77 million.



Demand: Provide three-month emergency summer funding proportionate to the AY fellowship amount.

3 months of funding proportionate to the usual 29K annual stipend would come to \$7250 per student. Taking 2943 as the number that receives a fellowship, this demand would cost \$21.3 million.



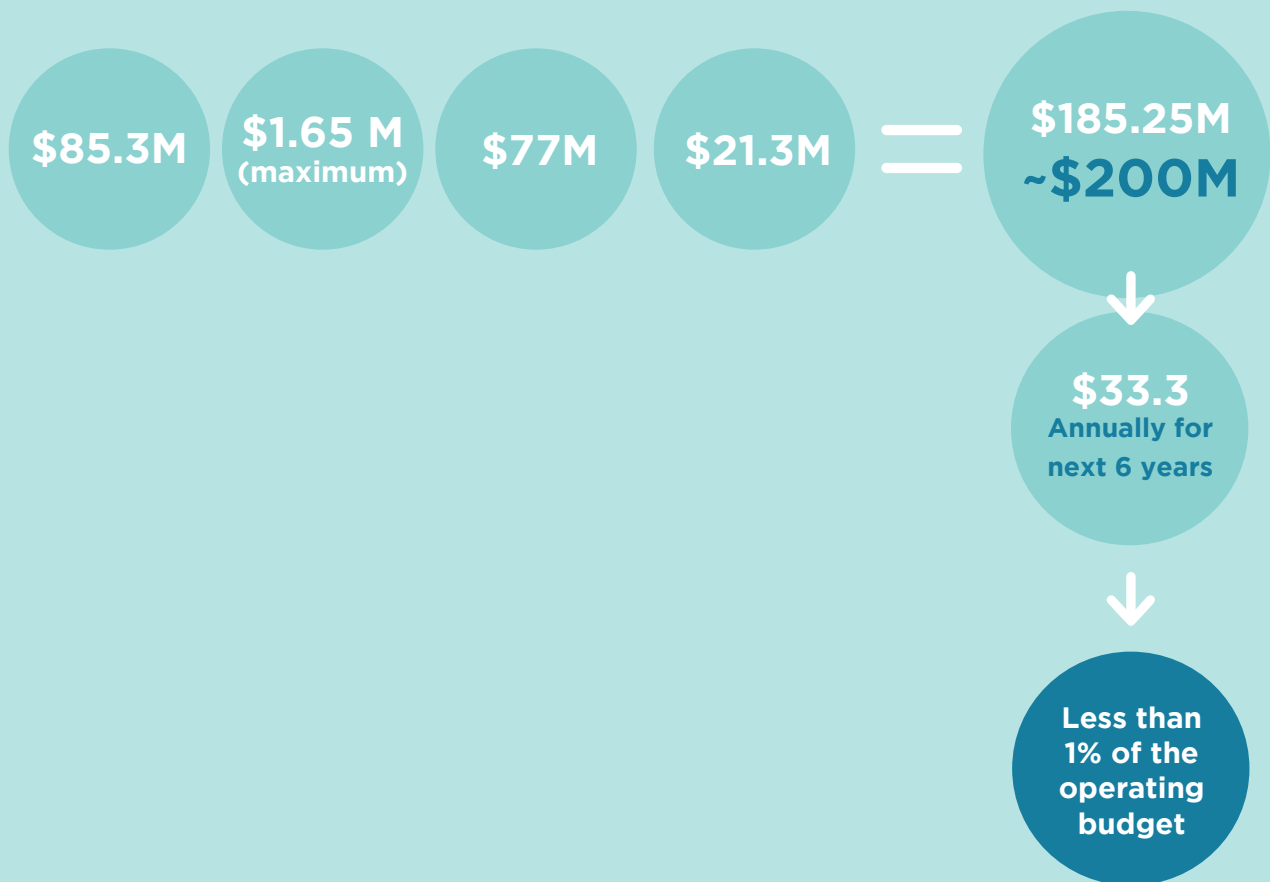
Demand: Extend I-20/DS-2019 and provide needed funding to all international and immigrant students so that they may maintain their immigration status.

No additional cost if the above demands are met.

TOTAL COST OF UNIVERSAL EXTENSION

Let's add it all up.

The things we know total over \$185 million. Let's round up significantly to account for things we don't know, like the cost of Master's students' stipends. This gives us a total cost of \$200 million. Remember, however, that these calculations were based on combined cohorts. That means these costs are spread over 5-6 years, the usual time it takes for a Ph.D. program. So the annual cost of universal extension for NYU would be around \$50 million, or less than 1% of the [3.493 billion dollar operating budget](#) for the university in 2019-20.



WHERE WILL THE MONEY COME FROM?

We presented many of the sources in NYUCanAffordIt Part 1—like increasing the distribution from the endowment. We examined NYU’s assets and presented reserves, and also NYU’s multi-billion dollar capital expansion plan. **Here we examine two more sources to fund a universal extension:**

1. High-level administrators’ salaries

We do not think the funds from universal extension should come from increasing tuition, cutting graduate enrollment, or from wages of other employees. But there are some employees we think should take a pay cut.



High-level administrators at at least 10 universities have announced reductions in their pay. Here are some examples:

Harvard University

President, Provost, Ex VP
25% salary cut
 (Deans, VPs, Vice Provost)

MIT

President and Provost
20% salary cut
 For 12 months

University of California

Chancellors and presidents
will take a 10% pay-cut

Stanford University

President and Provost
20% salary cut

University of Southern California

President
20% salary cut

University of Oregon

President
12% salary cut

WHAT ABOUT NYU ADMIN?

2. Capital expansion plan

NYU is has a giant, 10-year long plan to invest in land and infrastructure. So this is \$4 billion, mostly in real estate, without accountability to students, workers, or faculty because NYU refuses student or faculty representation on the Board of Trustees. \$4 Billion! For comparison, NYU’s estimates its losses in spring and summer at \$150 million.



Capital Expenditure VS Workers and Students

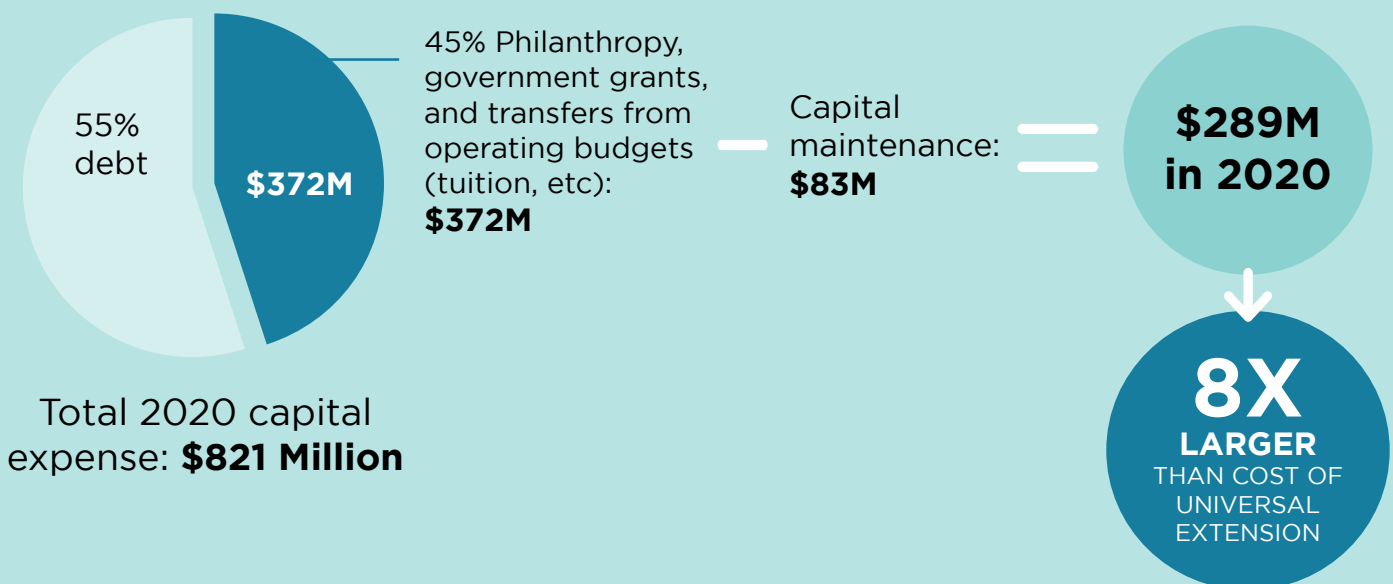
NYU Capital Budget and Ten Year Plan

Capital spending for FY2018 is forecast at \$335 million and projected to be \$3.605 billion for fiscal years 2019 through 2027. The plan proposes capital investments of \$3.941 billion, an increase of \$1.184 billion over the June 2017 plan. The increase includes \$344 million in carryover of delayed spending from FY2017 to FY2018 and beyond, plus the addition of two years to the plan, FY2026 and FY2027. Net new projects of \$467 million in the ten year plan.

While, of course, universities need space to operate, we believe that the way NYU operates like a real estate company is problematic. We believe that NYU should prioritize workers and students, especially during this pandemic.

In 2019-2020, NYU planned to spend \$821 million in its capital budget. Of course, some (55%) of it was to be financed through debt. We don't think we should take on more debt for a universal extension. But 45% of the capital budget came through donations, transfers from the operating budget (tuition, etc.), and government grants. That's \$372 million in the capital budget for this year, which is not debt-financed. Let's also subtract from it the money needed to keep existing infrastructure at NYU running, which NYU says is around \$83 million.

This still leaves \$289 million. This still leaves 289 million - that's more than 8 times larger than our estimated cost of universal extension (33.3 million)!



TESTIMONIALS

We want to emphasize that our campaign is calling for a universal extension for EVERYONE and that this campaign is representing a broad range of NYU schools, departments, and programs. In the letter we sent to Provost Fleming, we had graduate workers share some of their testimonials and stories, and one thing that was clear from these testimonials was that we are all struggling right now and have been affected by COVID-19.

Many of us work in labs and cannot access these labs. Many of us rely on having access to archives and are now unable to access these archives. Many of us rely on in-person training and equipment. Some graduate workers are parents and have children and/or partners to care for. Some graduate workers are international workers stranded in different parts of the world unable to renew our student visas because we can't prove we have sufficient funds, which is why a universal extension is so crucial for international students beyond their 5th year. Many of us are sick or have been sick or facing mental health issues, and are having a hard time isolating from the support systems we had pre-COVID.

We reject the university's attempts to pit us against each other for funding and we are unwilling to accept solutions that only reinforce the disparities between us. It doesn't really matter if you're a STEM worker, a humanities worker, an MFA worker—we all need this funding extension. It also doesn't matter if you're a 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 5th-year grad worker—we all need this funding extension.

At this reverse town hall, four graduate workers from four different schools and programs shared their personal experiences on how this pandemic has impacted them. This is only a glimpse of the many many testimonials people have shared with us. What's really important about our stories is that all of us have been impacted by this pandemic—whether it be workers from Tisch, Steinhardt, GSAS, the school of professional studies, or any other school or program at NYU.

A testimonial from a student at the Communicative Sciences and Disorders department in Steinhardt.

To whom this may concern:

I am a doctoral candidate and an international student who has a 3-year old child and a husband who needs to work from home full time. The COVID-19 pandemic has been very disruptive to my academic progress, my daily life, and my physical as well as mental health.

Our child's daycare center is closed, so my husband and I have to take turns looking after our child. This means none of us can work the hours we usually do. We have been staying up past 2 am catching up, and waking up again after less than 5 hours of sleep. Getting groceries is another source of stress: I either worried about no food on the table, or getting sick going out. The lack of sleep and extreme stress is affecting my productivity, my nerves, and will definitely delay my graduation date.

Faced with these difficulties, I still consider myself as one of the "lucky" ones, because I don't need to collect dissertation data yet. Many of my fellow doctoral students, on the other hand, had to halt their entire project because all human subject research is prohibited. What is scarier is no one knows how long this is going to last.

Financially, we are suffering as well. We will not receive a refund for the daycare tuition we had to pay in advance. Even though my husband can support our family financially at the moment, I am honestly not sure how long this will last. Not every graduate student I know has this luxury and some will struggle with paying rent, utility, and even food on the table.

As an international student, being in a foreign country and knowing little about how U.S. and immigration policy works are also very difficult. Not to mention without the support from family members. I feel for all the other international students who are extremely vulnerable at this uncertain time.

I am urging the university administration to do their best to relieve graduate student's troubles, difficulties, and stresses. This includes extended funding, full health insurance coverage for everyone, and relief funds for those in need. Graduate students are an indispensable part of the university community. Whatever applies to the faculty members should also apply to us. In the end, NYU won't regret doing the right thing because this will show the national and international academic community how great NYU is and how strong it stands behind its students.

A testimonial from Ana Novacic (3rd Year MFA student, Department of Design for Stage & Film)

As an international Production Design student who just returned from a health-related leave of absence, facing no income this summer is hard enough without the stress of no secured employment in the Fall semester.

My on-campus job here is dependent on the execution of theatrical productions which are a core component of our curriculum, our identity as a department, and what sets Tisch apart from every other film and theatre design program in the world. They cannot happen this year due to social distancing.

I need my university to support me at this complicated time. If my job can't continue this year exactly how it has in the past, alternative jobs need to exist, or NYU-funded stipends need to be provided to students of the equivalent value. In either case, the cost of our Health insurance must continue to be covered. Needless to say, our health must be protected during a pandemic.

As an international, I'm unable to apply for US student loans —nor student loans from my home country. I can't file for unemployment, nor receive an emergency stimulus check. External scholarships for film and theatrical design are extremely rare, and virtually inaccessible to internationals, and many have been outright canceled due to COVID. Going back 'home' doesn't ameliorate my financial situation either since I face unemployment there too.

Apart from employment, one of the main issues we face in my department is not having secured scholarships if we take a leave of absence. If we stay, we will receive a sub-par educational experience without our productions. We are film and theatre makers. We rely on hands-on work in physical places —building sets, sewing costumes, lighting shows. If we take a year off, we risk saying goodbye to our places at Tisch forever. For this reason, we need departmental funding to be extended for one year.

Our circumstances are beyond our control, and students should not be punished by an institution that can, instead, help them. This also means a partial tuition refund for the Spring 2020 semester, and/or tuition reductions for next year if film and theatre productions cannot happen at all. The one

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all. The one-off COVID emergency payment is not sufficient financial help. There are students at my department who have been repeatedly rejected for the grant with no explanation.

The single most effective way to keep students enrolled this year is through employment. Even if we somehow found external jobs that we could hold down with an extremely intense academic schedule, we run the risk of spreading COVID and slowing down our in-person return to campus. Homeland security is severely backed up, even if I, as an international, received a temporary work permit during the semester, I'm legally only allowed to work in an industry connected to my field of study. However, the entertainment industry as a whole is now on its knees due to the pandemic.

I'm currently selling furniture from my own home to pay for food, and oftentimes I find myself skipping meals. This should not be normal for an NYU graduate student and employee—especially not during a pandemic.

Finally, please consider this—if Tisch Alumni have a monetary and cultural responsibility to the university for the rest of their careers—just treatment of their students must start NOW.

A testimonial from Omar Gowayed (Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Department, Tandon School of Engineering)

This is my fourth year and my thesis is based on results from lab-based experiments. I was hoping to defend my thesis in Spring 2021, but as the months pass without experimentation, I am getting more and more worried about this deadline. My research is in shooting lasers to make crystals. These are high-powered lasers, so I can't do this from home. This means that my research has turned into me writing papers about data I don't have yet. I should be going to conferences, traveling, and finishing up research so I can write my dissertation. While I am grateful that they have sent us back with contact tracing, there are still issues like common spaces not being cleaned. On top of that, on a personal note, my partner

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lost their job. I had to fund health care, had to move, and was denied access to increased funds (presumably NYU emergency funding). Food costs have also doubled inside the city. For personal and work aspects, a universal extension would greatly help. I'm lucky that my prof can support me, but there are many who don't have that in Tandon and more broadly.

A testimonial from Ankit Bhardwaj (1st Year Ph.D., Sociology Department, GSAS)

My name is Ankit Bhardwaj. I am a first-year Ph.D. student in Sociology and my research plans have been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a myth that only some Ph.D. students are in their 'research years', but we are all here and encouraged to do research from day 1. All of our plans have been disrupted. I am an international student who aims to do global, comparative work for my dissertation project, and therefore must use any opportunity I can for fieldwork. My intention for this summer was to use the Global Research Institute Fellowship for a scoping study in Shanghai and to conduct some preliminary fieldwork in India. This was no longer possible due to stoppages to travel, approvals, and in-person research.

I chose to pursue my academic career at NYU, encouraged that the school had ambitions to be a global university. I thought that meant that it would protect and foster global research when the going got tough. With COVID-19, not providing funding extensions for graduate students has material consequences: trips to archives or for fieldwork not taken, conferences not attended, conversations on differences not had, research agendas not pursued, curiosities left unexplored. Without extensions, NYU limits graduate research, making it more parochial, less global in ambition, and reinforcing the borders that characterize academia to date.

CONCLUSION

Thank you all for coming. Thank you especially to the grads who shared their experiences and concerns; it's so important that graduate students are coming together and collectively fighting for our needs at this moment.

We are coming together, alongside other NYU workers, against the rhetoric of austerity that NYU has used and is prevalent across the country. We believe that NYU's priority should be to support its community members, particularly those who are most vulnerable—and we know it has the resources to do so.

To those who hold positions of power in the university: thank you for coming and listening to us. We hope we each recognize the different positions we have in the university and think about how we can each contribute. Often we have more power than we think we do. If you'd like to work with us to support grad students, or would like guidance on how to push NYU on our demand for a universal extension, please don't hesitate to reach out.

This universal extension is far from the only thing we are fighting for! We want to make you all, especially fellow grads, aware of our upcoming organizing:

1. We are bargaining for our next contract this summer, grads can get involved in our [contract campaign](#) and support during bargaining
2. [Summer Organizing School](#)
3. Organizing around cutting [NYU-NYPD ties](#) and making NYU safe for Black students
4. Continue advocating for grad concerns around the COVID crisis as we head towards the uncertainty of the fall semester

This struggle is for all of us, and should be by all of us, so get involved. Thank you all for coming, and don't hesitate to reach out with further questions.



After the presentations, we opened the floor for staff, graduate students, and faculty to raise questions to GSOC representatives. Below are their questions and responses.

1. Graduate student: ...how are we going to escalate with contract negotiations coming up in August if we don't receive our demands for a universal extension?

GSOC Facilitator: I can jump in because I'm also a member of the bargaining committee. We have currently entered [impact bargaining](#), which started yesterday. As far as escalation, we have a no-strike clause in the contract, but that expires in August. Escalation before that point is an open question. There has been rank and file organizing.

GSOC Member: Adding on to that, impact bargaining is open. It's important to attend and make it a sea of faces. A link will be sent out on social media, so keep an eye on that.

GSOC Bargaining Committee (BC) Member: As I mentioned, NYU does not consider our stipends to be wages. We reject this framework in our negotiations. This makes it doubly important for students to keep putting pressure on their departments. Our stipends are in fact wages. Another form of escalation is talking to coworkers, emphasizing that our research is labor and that we are working all of the time.

2. Graduate student: Do you have any idea about what has happened to the emergency relief grant? The student was not granted the funding; they were denied a small sum of money that was going to be used for supplies for a project that is due before NYU is even supposed to open. Did any grad students receive funding at all?

GSOC Facilitator: Can you use thumbs up or raise your hand if you were denied emergency funding? We've seen a lot of cases of this.

BC Member: We heard in May that there was a mass rejection, where students received the same email. We did an informal collection of stories from people. From a group of 90 students, it looks like past mid-April there was around an 80-90% rejection rate. We contacted the office of financial aid and we have not heard back. It took two weeks to hear just that our email had been sent to the

This is a topic in impact bargaining. This is concerning because we've been told by even well-meaning faculty that these funds exist; it is disingenuous of the university. It's great if the funding is going to undergrads, of course, we fully support this, but the fact remains that graduate students are in dire straits and need funding too.

BC Member 2: There is the NYU emergency fund, but then there is also the CARES act funding received from the federal government. There are strings attached to that (e.g. can't provide to international students or undocumented students). This is a topic in impact bargaining: if you can't use the funds due to citizenship status, we call on NYU to provide comparable funds. We don't want xenophobic US policy to continue to affect the way that NYU awards emergency funds.

This question brought up a lot of comments in the zoom chat, including:

Graduate student: I applied and received it—my partner did too and was denied (no difference in the situation)

Graduate student: My classmate fully funded by her father's got the emergency funding. "For rent".

Graduate student: Never received it after applying twice.

On the Steinhardt specific grant, I was encouraged to not apply because my 20 hours should cover me. 20 hours that start next week.

Graduate student: Students have been rejected after requesting it for things as basic food. I'm a non-citizen, I guess I was just lucky to receive it?

3. Faculty member: Could you say more about the argument against cutting admissions because it will hurt future students? For departments—including mine—that have decided to cut, the idea was to support existing students. A secondary concern was that it might not be a good idea to keep admitting graduate students given that the job market is a disaster.

GSOC Facilitator: We definitely shared the same concerns.

GSOC Unit Rep: That question is really pressing. It's true the job market has collapsed. We came in knowing that the job market was already crumbling. We understand very much that departments have a responsibility to students to take them in and then not just cast them out. Here are two reasons why future cuts are a problem:

MA students get MA degrees because they want to get a Ph.D. on the other side. They made a 100k investment in an MA degree, and now for what?

There is concern that a future cut would fall disproportionately on students of color...just as the pipeline might be opening up a little bit for Black, Latinx, and other marginalized students, that might be closed off again.

Ultimately, in the history department, there have been discussions about other

avenues to take. NYU is a university that positions itself as a private university in the public interest. We can take more concrete steps and actions that support post-MA or post-PhD students in finding paths outside of academia. Then there's the concern that those Ph.D. lines will disappear.

BC Member 3: I'm from a very small department in Steinhardt (around two students every year). We're worried some of these departments will disappear. Will we have any grad workers in the future? Some people from the MFA or Tisch have mentioned that there were previously admission cuts, and what ended up happening is that these programs just disappeared. We don't want to see our own programs disappear into the void.

GSOC Member 3: I want to echo what everyone has already articulated, especially Sandy. For those of us in small programs like performance studies, if we cut the number of students we run a very significant risk of losing the department altogether. Performance studies are the number one rated department in the country in our field, and yet in 2008 the Ph.D. lines were cut in half from 8 to 4 with the promise they would be reinstated eventually but they never were. If we were to cut from 4 to 2, the possibility of cutting from 4 to nothing is really strong. This changes the department's commitment to supporting students for their whole tenure. This also dramatically changes the quality of the work that students can do in the department (e.g. if you have only one other colleague). Also, if you keep cutting then it makes it difficult to get the experience you need to be competitive in the field (eg. if there aren't MA students to teach, then you can't get teaching experience). It filters down from the Ph.D. to MAs.

GSOC Member: This still places the burden on future students. For years, faculty and student groups have been asking for transparency for NYU's budget. If we give up on asking the university to do more, we are doing a disservice to all future generations of students.

BC Member: Faculty members here have been wonderful advocates in trying to get more support for us. Our opposition to cuts is not opposed to those plans and those faculty or department decisions. It's a rejection of GSAS forcing faculty into doing this.

GSOC Member 3: A Ph.D. is not just about a future position. A lot of people in our department are international, trans, people of color. A lot of these people are in precarious positions in their own countries. The department functions almost as a safe haven for a lot of people, and cuts would mean denying that space for these people. An important conversation is what kind of home and have a Ph.D. program can provide, especially for marginalized and precarious students.

4. Stephen Rechner (UCATS): Thanks, I found this very informative. I did not fully understand the issues, and maybe I still don't, but I understand better now. As president of UCATS, I have a self-interest here. Clerical and technical workers are here to support faculty and students, so if you're cut, it's only a matter of time

before we're cut. We have about 800 people on our e-list. I usually refuse to circulate petitions (it fills up the inbox), but I made an exception this time and had a very positive response. Nobody asked to be taken off the list and many contacted to express their support. We'll be there with you.

5. Graduate student: There was a comment in the chat that thanked faculty and admin who did join today. Administrative workers and faculty had registered. Yet no deans or board of trustee members attended, and we're disappointed. We're very grateful to those who did show up.

6. Graduate student: This is a question about timelines. Within the university's proposal about possible funding extensions for some people, they said you'd know about mid-June, then they said later. Does anybody know if those meetings are happening and what's happening in them?

GSOC Facilitator: I can talk to what I know in bio, where we did organize to get faculty to support universal extension. We didn't get support from the DGS or chair, because they said there was a meeting scheduled in mid-June to discuss the extension of funding with Harper. The bio situation is different from other depts, since many people get external funding, so the DGS and chair kept saying there was nothing to worry about.

BC Member: We recently heard in our department that our extension plan had been approved by GSAS dean Phil Harper. Years 3-5 are getting one year, and years 1-2 are getting a half extension. But we know many departments can't agree to department cuts so we want to keep advocating for universal extension.

Graduate student: What if no one is advocating for you?

BC Member: We can share organizing resources, it's important to know what faculty are asking.

APPENDIX

Email from Provost Katherine Fleming

Mon, Apr 20, 2020 at 11:24 AM

Dear [Name of GSOC Activist],

I hope this email finds you and all those in your life safe and healthy and managing the impacts and restrictions caused by COVID-19 as well as can be hoped for.

We recognize that many different types of graduate students have been adversely affected by COVID-19. Accordingly, the emergency assistance available through the Office of Financial Aid is open to all graduate students; indeed, of the 8,500 students that have already received some \$4 million in emergency aid, approximately 30% are graduate students. Moreover, our Leave of Absence policy, which we have made more flexible, applies to all graduate students.

However, that does not mean that doctoral and master's programs are alike in all regards. Virtually all the courses at the graduate level, as well as the undergraduate level, are carrying on this semester. And master's thesis defenses, as well as dissertation defenses, have proceeded remotely. Generally speaking, the University has emphasized greater efforts to shorten time to degree for PhD students. Nevertheless, the particular predicament of carrying on doctoral level dissertation research against the backdrop of COVID-19 stands apart, and that is why NYU is working to provide an exceptional extension for doctoral students at that stage of their studies.

The same basic idea holds true for extending funding. We value our master's students very greatly. But the funding model for master's-level studies differs radically from that of doctoral-level studies. Our University and other research universities make a particularly large investment in doctoral education because of the special responsibility we have to cultivate the next generation of scholars. It is simply unsustainable to extend the doctoral financial model to master's students across the board, as you have proposed.

We are working to develop additional stipend support to complete dissertation-related research, though this effort will take some time - perhaps 60 days - to conclude. However, the pressures brought on by the coronavirus make budgetary decision-making more complex, not less, so a University-wide solution to fellowships is also unworkable.

Graduate studies are hard in the best of times. I understand how much more arduous they must be in the current environment. I appreciate your perseverance and the way you are standing up for your fellow graduate students, even if the answers I give you are a disappointment.

Sincerely,

Katherine Fleming