**Briefing Note for the Dean and Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS), UBC**

**Purpose**

To present options for how G+PS can support development of an intergenerational co-living program as an affordable and community-minded housing option for graduate students at UBC Vancouver.

**Background**

A 2018 survey of UBC graduate students found 91% of respondents were dissatisfied with their cost of living and one in 10 respondents considered dropping out due to financial stress.(1) Evidently, living affordability is a prerequisite for students’ academic success. A possible affordable housing option is intergenerational co-living, where graduate students looking for low-cost housing are matched with local seniors looking for companionship and basic support at home. Co-living programs in Europe have been found to be a desirable and economical way to reduce social isolation among ageing populations.(2,3) Further, the *Symbiosis* program at McMaster University has shown promise around the viability and benefits of intergenerational co-living programs in a Canadian graduate school context.(4)

**Current Status**

The current G+PS Strategic Plan calls for expansion of student funding and living affordability.(5) A key initiative under the Plan has been to enrich the student experience, which includes ensuring graduate students can obtain housing that meets their needs and means.(6) So far, in response, G+PS has given graduate students priority to one-bedroom apartments in campus residences and improved access to winter session housing. Moreover, ad hoc intergenerational co-living arrangements have been made through the UBC Graduate Student Community forums, indicating interest for such opportunities.

**Options**

*Option 1: Develop pilot project in collaboration with UBC and external partners to assess feasibility, desirability and viability of an ongoing intergenerational co-housing program through G+PS*.

* Pro: Coordination and leadership though G+PS can ensure project has sufficient visibility and credibility to attract and potentially benefit a large group of students and senior participants.
* Con: A pilot project will require sizable human and financial inputs to develop and implement. Should project continue in the long-term, funding needs to be secured for administrative costs.

*Option 2: Create grant inviting interdisciplinary UBC researchers to collaborate with relevant local organizations to develop an intergenerational co-living project and measure its social, health and wellbeing, and economic impact on student and senior participants.*

* Pro: A research project approach allows rigorous evaluations of program outcomes to generate high quality evidence around program impact and its potential for replicability in other settings.
* Con: The process will be protracted due to significant time required to run a grant competition and for research development and ethics approval protocol.

**Key Considerations**

* G+PS’ direct involvement creates a reputational risk for the University should any student-senior matches go awry. However, the restriction of such programs to graduate students and use of a rigorous screening process, as is the case with *Symbiosis* at McMaster University, could mitigate risks for the University, plus encourage program uptake by senior participants.
* Program development and implementation relies on building community partnerships, which further advances UBC’s strategic goals for local engagement and equity.

**Recommendation**

Option 2 is recommended. Implementing an intergenerational co-living program as part of an interdisciplinary and community-based participatory study enables a more evidence-based approach to program implementation. This initiative not only aligns with G+PS’ strategic priorities to address student living affordability, but also has potential to positively impact the broader community by reducing isolation among seniors in Vancouver.

**Appendix I: Audience**

The target audience for my briefing note is the UBC Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) and specifically, the G+PS Dean and Vice-Provost, Dr. Susan Porter. I chose this audience because the G+PS has a vested interest in the wellbeing and success of UBC’s graduate and postdoctoral students, of which one aspect is students’ ability to support the high costs of living in Vancouver. However, given the ambitious nature of this project, I believe the note will need to be escalated to the G+PS leadership team. I also chose the G+PS because the office can feasibly address the issue at hand—the University has the human resources, funding and social capital to support the collaborative development, implementation and evaluation of my proposed project.

**Appendix II: References**

1. Graduate Student Society. Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey 2017-2018: Summary Report & Recommendations [Internet]. Vancouver, BC: Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver; 2018 May. Available from: http://gss.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GSSStudentSurveySummary2018.pdf

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4. Abed S, Maharaj S. Symbiosis: Grad Students and Seniors Co-Housing Program [Internet]. gs.mcmaster.ca. 2018 [cited 2020 Mar 8]. Available from: https://gs.mcmaster.ca/graduate-student-life/spices/2017/symbiosis-grad-students-and-seniors-co-housing-program

5. Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Strategic Plan 2019-2024 [Internet]. Vancouver, BC: UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; 2019 Jan. Available from: https://static.grad.ubc.ca/docs/UBC-GPS-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024.pdf

6. Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Enriching the Student Experience [Internet]. Graduate School at The University of British Columbia (UBC). 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 8]. Available from: https://www.grad.ubc.ca/strategic-priorities/enriching-student-experience