



December 12, 2012

To: Chair Diamantis and the Financial Affairs Committee of the USNH Board of Trustees

cc: President Mark Huddleston, Vice-President Dick Cannon, Vice-President Mark Rubinstein, Vice-President Joanna Young, Dean Harry Richards, and Dean Cari Moorhead

From: The UNH Graduate Student Senate

Re: FY14 mandatory graduate student fees

On December 4, the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) reviewed the proposed FY14 mandatory fees to be assessed to graduate students. At this meeting, the GSS voted to approve all nine proposed FY14 fees: SHARPP, Campus Recreation, Counseling, Health Services, Transportation, Technology, Memorial Union Building (MUB), Housing, and Dining. Though these fees were approved, there was concern over the continued reliance on mandatory fees and total cost of attendance increases to balance the UNH budget. Increasing cost of attendance is an issue for both tuition-paying students and for students with Graduate Assistantships. Graduate Assistants spend an increasing fraction of their stipends on paying mandatory fees, as well as on-campus housing, if chosen, because stipends have not increased at the same rate as cost of attendance. As in previous years, graduate students also voiced concern that the mandatory fee system charges the same fees of all students, regardless of service use. Finally, while the GSS was happy to see some progress towards a shift from a limited mandatory fee discussion to a more inclusive discussion of the total cost of attendance and budget priorities, there is much work to be done by all involved to make the annual financial oversight process more timely, organized, and productive.

Foremost, **the GSS would like to commend all of the auxiliary units for their efforts to cut costs and constrain their budgets to minimal increases.** We realize that the majority of the budget increase for almost every unit was the result of mandated increases in the general and facilities assessment rates and in salaries and fringe benefits. Despite these increases, Health Services was able to propose no increase in their fee for the second consecutive year. Dining was able to limit cost increases of most of their plans to 3% and did not increase the cost of others at all. With the exception of Transportation and the MUB, all other units were able to keep their increases at or below the guideline value of 3%. Moreover, increases to the Transportation fee and the MUB fee were partly in response to increased demand for services.

However, the GSS believes that there are still many places where improvements could be made and costs reduced. The GSS encourages Information Technology to continue to monitor the usefulness, quality, and cost-effectiveness of services and software provided to ensure their necessity and contribution to the University's mission. We would also like to see Dining Services work to incorporate University produced food

into its offerings wherever possible. In addition, the GSS would like Campus Recreation to emphasize minimizing costs as it works to expand its facilities and services for students.

The GSS voted to approve a 10% increase in the Transportation fee for FY14. While this level of increase is not acceptable on an on-going basis, the GSS felt that it was justified for this year in order to meet the demand for increased service and associated fuel costs, to support the addition of a new route serving Rochester, and to make up for losses in revenue from parking permits. The GSS commends Transportation Services for obtaining grants for both the bus and the majority of the operating costs for the new Rochester route, but we are also interested in monitoring its success, specifically regarding graduate student use. As such, **we recommend that Transportation Services perform a careful cost-benefit analysis of the Rochester route after its first year of operation. We also recommend that Transportation Services review its permit rates for students, faculty, and staff to look for ways to increase revenue through fair, graduated pricing.**

The GSS did pass the MUB fee this year. We feel the MUB has made an effort to respond to graduate student concerns and make graduate students more aware of the opportunities the MUB has to offer them. However, some graduate students still feel the Memorial Union Building is not an important part of their university experience, and certainly not important enough to justify the magnitude of the MUB fee. A large part of that fee is related to the building itself. The MUB is a large building, and its operation is highly reliant on student fees as the major source of revenue. While we realize that there are limitations to raising revenue with the MUB space, **we recommend that the University administration and the MUB explore all possibilities for using the Memorial Union Building in ways that will raise revenue or decrease costs for the MUB RCM unit. We also recommend that the MUB continue to assess and try to meet graduate student needs.**

Unlike the past two years, the GSS voted to approve the increase in rents for Forest Park and Babcock Hall for FY14. We remain concerned that **the rate of increase in the cost of on-campus housing is vastly outpacing the increase in funded and unfunded graduate student incomes and that current and prospective tenants may be priced out of on-campus housing, especially if graduate student incomes do not increase enough to offset this added cost.** We are also concerned that any lack of demand for on-campus graduate housing at these prices will be misinterpreted as a lack of demand for on-campus graduate housing in general. Despite these concerns, we believe that the proposed rent increase of 3% for FY14 is reasonable given this unit's situation, including rising facilities assessment and utilities costs. However, we fully expect the University administration to work with Housing to address these difficulties and provide affordable on-campus housing for graduate students in the short- and long-term. While UNH is exploring alternative funding models for subsidized on-campus graduate student housing through its Campus Master Plan, these long-term changes will not help current students who pay between 55% and 80% of their pre-tax stipend in housing costs and mandatory fees. **We recommend that the University administration and Housing explore all avenues to ensure that on-campus graduate housing remains viable and affordable.**

Graduate Student Senate

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Concerns over the total cost of attendance, UNH budget priorities, and the competitive value of a UNH degree remained major issues in GSS meetings and in our mandatory fee discussion this year. Overall, full-time graduate student fees for the academic year will increase by 2.5% from \$1,699 in FY13 to \$1,741 in FY14. This was the second consecutive year of relatively modest increases. We are glad to see overall fee increases being brought more in-line with standard inflation indicators, which have been around 2%-3% in the last 10 years; however, Graduate Assistant stipends have not increased similarly. **Full-time Graduate Assistants will pay on average 10% of their pre-tax, academic-year stipend in mandatory fees during FY14, if stipends do not increase.**¹ If the rate of increase in fees continues to outpace the rate of increase in stipends, it undermines the ability of current graduate students to cover the cost of attendance and decreases the competitiveness of many of our graduate programs and research efforts by limiting our ability to recruit the highest quality graduate students.

All of the auxiliary units, with the exception of Technology and SHARPP, once again saw significant increases in their costs due to an increase in the general assessment rate mandated through the Responsibility Centered Management model. The GSS continues to be concerned that the increase in the general assessment for auxiliary units is a cost shifting mechanism intended to mask an increase in the total cost of attendance by allowing for a smaller increase in tuition. While fees remain a particularly important issue for a large number of graduate students, we welcomed the effort this year to shift the focus of the annual fee oversight discussion from only mandatory fees to the total cost of attendance and budget priorities. Meetings between the President, several Vice-Presidents, and students were a good start to the conversation about 'big picture' budget issues. **We look forward to making progress in this direction in future years and developing meeting formats, information exchange protocols, and a schedule that will allow the GSS to adequately inform our constituents and produce useful feedback.**

Should you have any questions regarding this statement or if you wish to work with us to address the specific issues we have identified, please contact us.

Sincerely,

The UNH Graduate Student Senate
Sonic Woytonik, President
Bob Swarthout, Vice President
John McClain, Treasurer, Fee Oversight Committee Chair
Ian Cohen, USNH Board of Trustees Representative
Dan Tran, Clerk
Emily Klein, Programs Coordinator

¹ A clarification for comparison to other figures: The Technology fee is waived for Graduate Assistants. Thus, while the sum of all mandatory fees (\$1,741) exceeds 11% of the average academic-year stipend (\$15,800) for Graduate Assistants, the fees paid by GAs amount to 10% of their stipend.