



December 6, 2013

To: President Mark Huddleston

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

From: The UNH Graduate Student Senate

Re: FY15 mandatory graduate student fees

On November 19, the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) reviewed the proposed FY15 mandatory fees and rates for graduate students. **This year the GSS approved 5 of the 7 fees (SHARPP, Counseling Center, Health Services, Memorial Union Building (MUB), and Technology) as well as the rates for Housing and Dining.** The GSS rejected the fees proposed by Campus Recreation and Transportation.

This year we altered our fee process to allow for more communication with our constituents and received feedback from many graduate students. However, many of the concerns in this letter echo sentiments voiced by the GSS in the past. **Again this year, the GSS is concerned over the continued reliance on mandatory fees to balance the UNH budget.** This year, many graduate students voiced their dissatisfaction with the increase in mandatory fees, suggesting that this was contrary to the Board's commitment to freeze in-state tuition. Many students felt that promising to hold tuition constant while continuing to raise fees ran counter to the spirit of the compromise reached with the State Legislature. Specifically, we felt an increase of the Technology fee, which has been deemed an academic fee that is required by every UNH student, was unfair in light of the commitment to freeze in-state tuition.

Foremost, the **GSS commends the Directors and management of all of the fee units for their efforts to minimize costs and operate efficiently despite increasing demands by both student users and the administration.** We understand that a majority of the fee units do not have total control over their budgets since a large majority of the revenue that the fees generate is paid out under the facilities and general assessments levied under the RCM model. In previous years, the GSS has reiterated concern over the perceived use of the general assessment charged to the auxiliary units by the Responsibility Centered Management (RCM) model as a cost shifting mechanism. We also understand that the fee units must meet the campus-wide salary increases granted by the university administration. However, it appears that the University has established a culture where fee increases seem acceptable so long as they are at or below 3%. We feel this eliminates all incentive for the fee units to work to avoid fee increases.

The GSS approved the relatively large fee increases for the Counseling Center (11.6%) and SHARPP (66.7%). We understand that the increases are motivated by the need to add staff to meet minimum compliance requirements. We recognize that demand and need for these services have been increasing at UNH and campuses across the country. Likewise, the GSS approved the FY15 fee for Health Services, which proposed no increase for the third consecutive year.

The GSS is concerned over the continued use of “increased student demand” as justification for increasing services and subsequently fees. **In many instances, we find that this is in fact “increased *undergraduate* student demand”, yet since graduate and undergraduate students do not pay differential fee rates, these costs for increased services are levied on graduate students who do not want nor use them.** For example, a stated driver for the Technology fee increase is to hire a full-time employee to run the Parker Media Lab “to address student demand”. While we lack data on graduate student usage of the lab, we do not believe that it is a significant factor in the need for a full-time position. Similarly, we are concerned about the recent decision to expand the Hamel Recreation Center. We do not feel that sufficient care has been taken to assure that the “significant student demand” that has motivated this decision includes graduate students. Many graduate students are already concerned and dissatisfied by the Campus Recreation fee and we fear that the expansion of the facilities will only exacerbate that issue. We also feel it is important to note that students often express desire for “increased demand” for services in the context of sunk costs. Students may try to get more out of the services that they have already paid for; however, that does not mean that students would consciously decide to pay extra for such a service, as the fee units seem to assume.

The GSS also has concerns over new or expanded services that will be funded by fees assessed to all students, but cater primarily to those who live in on-campus residences. For instance, Transportation reported that it is partnering with Housing to offer new “study buses” that will ferry students from their dorms to the library at late hours. This was supposedly motivated by interviews with Housing residents who expressed the desire for such a service; unfortunately, the support of this new service is part of Transportation’s justification for its fee increase. We argue that neither graduate students, most of who do not live on campus, or any other commuter student should be shouldering the cost of such a service. We suggest that the cost of this service should be placed within the Housing budget, so that only those students who live in the residence halls and can make use of the service will incur the cost. Likewise, part of the justification for this year’s increase in the MUB fee was increased usage of the MUB Granite State Station mailroom. We question why students who do not live on campus, and so do not need on-campus mailboxes, are footing the cost for such services. While some graduate students do utilize these MUB mailboxes, the MUB fee that all graduate students are paying is much greater than the cost that would be incurred by that minority of graduate student users if they were to purchase P.O. boxes at the U.S. Post Office in Durham.

The GSS received feedback from many graduate students who felt extremely dissatisfied with the across-the-board assessment of fees to all students regardless of usage. Many full-time Masters students, who have no desire or time to utilize the facilities or benefits that the fees cover, expressed their aggravation over being forced to pay the fees. Numerous students also expressed the preference for a pay-for-use model, especially for Campus Recreation. The substantial Campus Recreation fee (\$502 proposed for FY15) seems a significant financial burden to levy on students for services that they may not want, need, or utilize; this is especially outstanding when annual membership to local fitness centers are much more affordable. This is one reason why the GSS did not approve the proposed \$502 fee for FY15. The proposed FY15 MUB fee of \$362 was passed by the slimmest of margins, but the overall size of the fee is a point

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of concern for many members of the GSS. While we acknowledge the efforts by the MUB Director and management to engage and attempt to accommodate graduate students with its programming and services, many graduate students do not feel that the level of usage or need of graduate students justifies this large fee. Some suggest that the MUB and other fee units should attempt to reduce services, where possible, to minimize fee increases, while others suggest allowing graduate students to pay a reduced fee in light of their minimal usage of MUB services.

Again this year, the GSS voted to approve the increase in rents for Forest Park and Babcock Hall for FY15. While we appreciate that the rates for apartment-style and all Forest Park units will not be increasing, we note that the motivation for that is increased competition from off-campus apartment units and not a desire to maintain affordable on-campus options for graduate students. Although the rate for the units in Babcock Hall will be increasing by 3%, we feel this is justified given the maintenance of rates at Forest Park and the increasing costs of facilities, salaries, and utilities. However, **we again recommend that the University administration and Housing explore all avenues to ensure that on-campus graduate housing remains viable and affordable.**

As in the past, we must emphasize that total cost of attendance (not just tuition) is a major issue for both tuition-paying students and students with Graduate Assistantships. The total proposed FY15 mandatory fees equal over 13% of in-state tuition. **Full-time Graduate Assistants will pay approximately 10% of their pre-tax, academic-year stipend in mandatory fees during FY15.** The impact of the rising total cost of attendance is even direr for international graduate students living on campus, many of whom have a difficult time finding off-campus housing options before moving to the US. For these students, their Graduate Assistantship is their only source of income due to visa restrictions and they pay nearly 80% of their stipend towards mandatory fees, room, and board. For those with families, this is a nearly unmanageable situation. It should also be noted that the fee approval process is made more difficult by the uncertainty in Graduate Assistantship stipends. The stipends for FY15 will not be determined until the Spring semester, so the GSS must approve the fees for next year without confidence or assurance that the stipends will increase at a matching rate. Every year that the increase of fees outpaces the rate of increase in stipends affects the ability of current graduate students to cover the cost of attendance and complete their degrees and decreases the competitiveness of many of our graduate programs and research efforts by limiting their ability to recruit the highest quality graduate students.

In summary, this year the GSS approved 5 of the 7 fees (SHARPP, Counseling Center, Health Services, Memorial Union Building (MUB), and Technology) as well as the rates for Housing and Dining. As in the past, the GSS commends the Directors and management of all of the fee units for their efforts to minimize costs and operate efficiently, but remains concerned over the continued reliance on mandatory fees to balance the UNH budget. Likewise, we again emphasize that total cost of attendance (not just tuition) is a major issue for both tuition-paying students and students with Graduate Assistantships. After altering our fee process this year to allow for more communication with our constituents we received feedback from many graduate students who raised concern over the fee increases and the impact that they had on their ability and desire to

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continue their graduate studies at UNH. **We look forward to working with the UNH administration to address these concerns and minimize the total cost of attendance of graduate education at UNH.**

Should you have any questions regarding this letter 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
Ian Cohen, President
Joe Gilbert, Vice President
Deanna Silva, Treasurer
Dan Tran, Clerk
Madhav Baral, Programs Coordinator
John McClain, External Affairs Officer

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