



# University of New Hampshire

To: President Mark Huddleston

Cc: Vice-President Mark Rubinstein, Vice-President Dick Cannon, Vice-President Joanna Young, Kerry Scala, Dean Harry Richards, Dean Cari Moorhead, Joseph Sweeney and Francesca Bragan of Student Senate, Mary Anne Lustgraff, Stacey Hall, David Cross, Terri Winters, Dirk Timmons, Amy Culp, Cindy McGahey, Jon Plodzik, Kathy Irla-Chesney, David May, and Kevin Charles.

From: The Graduate Student Senate

Re: FY 2016 mandatory graduate student fees

Dear President Huddleston,

December 4, 2014

It is an honor for the Executive Committee of the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) to present and explain the Senate's votes on the auxiliary units' mandatory fee proposals for FY 2016. **The GSS convened on December 2, 2014, and held two votes per fee.** The first vote asked voting members (which includes senators as well as Executive Committee members aside from the President) to decide on whether or not a particular fee ought to be mandatory (or, in the case of Dining and Housing, whether or not the overall rates were deemed prudent). The second vote called for voting members to weigh in on each proposed fee change. This process was a departure from previous years when the GSS only voted once per fee. In past years, a single up or down vote for each auxiliary unit left some ambiguity as to a senator's intentions. This meant that one senator voting "nay" could be doing so only because he or she found the proposed change to be unjustified, but was not necessarily opposed to last year's fee rate, while another senator voting "nay" could be hoping to send a message that the entire fee, and not simply the proposed change, was inappropriate. This year's process was therefore adjusted to clarify the intentions of the GSS.

**In brief, the GSS voted that the Campus Recreation fee should not be mandatory for graduate students by a wide margin, and it also rejected that auxiliary unit's proposed fee change. Voting members passed the motion that the MUB fee continue to be mandatory for graduate students, but they narrowly rejected the change in the MUB fee. The Senate widely approved of keeping the fees for the Counseling Center, Transportation, SHARPP, and Technology mandatory for graduate students, though it passed the motion to keep the Health Services fee a mandatory one for graduate students by just a narrow margin.** GSS Voting members also passed the motions to approve of the fee proposals for these units in FY

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2016, though again within a wide range of opinion (see **Tables 1 and 2 for GSS votes on each motion per auxiliary unit**).

**The Senate's assertion that Campus Recreation's fee be voluntary for graduate students deserves special attention.** The consensus in the Senate was that too many graduate students already feel overburdened by their academic enterprises and/or other work and family responsibilities to make use of the facilities and resources of Campus Recreation at all. Academic expectations for graduate students are intense, while graduate students are more likely than undergraduate students to have families and part or full-time jobs that leave them with little to no recreational time. Furthermore, a majority of graduate students live off-campus and thus are much less likely to utilize the on-campus facilities. This led to the conclusion that the obligatory nature of the fee was unjustified given the realities faced by many graduate students.

It is important to note that **these sentiments concerning Campus Recreation emerged from the feedback that we received directly from the graduate student body**, both by e-mail and by word of mouth. The mandatory nature of the Campus Recreation fee seems to be of particular concern to part-time graduate students. These individuals have expressed that their part-time status is a reflection of the fact that they have other responsibilities and therefore little time to make use of the resources available at Campus Recreation. One part-time MBA student in Paul College wrote to us, observing, "I do not live on campus and have not used any of the recreational offerings in the 1.5 years I've been enrolled in the PT MBA program." Noting that he has a twenty-five minute commute to campus and a full time job, this student concluded that "there is not time to even think about using the recreational facilities." The high cost of the fee frustrates other graduate students who do not have time to use these facilities. Some students noted that the Campus Recreation fee seems grossly overinflated when considering much cheaper local alternatives. One student asked, "If I don't make use of those services, why do I need to pay over \$500 for them in one academic year?" Another was more blatant in an e-mail to the GSS: "It's obscene," she wrote, that she pays for recreational facilities that she is not interested in utilizing while simultaneously "deciding between eating or paying the electricity bill." While there is no doubt that regular exercise is beneficial to mental and physical health, for many graduate students paying a fee for facilities that they do not use raises their financial stress and takes a toll on their overall wellbeing. **The mandatory nature of the Campus Recreation fee thereby appears to have the opposite effect of its intention for graduate students.**

While the GSS was opposed to an obligatory Campus Recreation fee, **it was also very clear in its willingness to engage in creative solutions to the issue.** Moving forward, the Senate especially wants more raw and interpreted data concerning graduate student use of the facilities at Campus Recreation, and it urges the staff at Campus Recreation to begin gathering such data for next year's fee oversight process. It is also clear that there are some graduate students who do use and enjoy Campus Recreation's resources (including members of the GSS), a fact that led the Senate to support making the Campus Recreation fee optional for those who do have the time

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and interest in making use of those resources. However, the question remains as to whether or not graduate students use the facilities because they're already paying for them, and would, if given the opportunity, join another local, more cost-effective gym. This question, as well as others pertaining to graduate student usage of Campus Recreation and other auxiliary units, will be posed to the graduate student body in a GSS survey in the Spring 2015 semester. Between that survey data and the numbers from Campus Recreation, the GSS hopes to have more accurate information for what our next steps ought to be.

Aside from Campus Recreation, the Senate's approval for keeping the Memorial Union Building (MUB) fee mandatory while also rejecting its proposed fee change deserves elaboration. **The first vote reflects the fact that GSS Voting members are aware of the great value offered by the MUB in enhancing graduate student life and education on campus.** The GSS especially noted that the MUB's partnership with academic departments to bring academic speakers to campus enriches the academic viability of the University. The Senate is also aware of the increase in graduate-specific meetings in the MUB in recent years, as well as the summer services that the MUB provides to graduate students and their families. Lastly, the GSS sees the value in having a common community center that houses diverse student groups and organizations and that serves as an extracurricular meeting ground for students. In this sense, the mission of the MUB aligns nicely with one of the primary missions of the GSS: to foster a pan-departmental graduate student community.

All that being said, **the GSS narrowly rejected the proposed fee change for the MUB because of lingering concerns on several fronts.** For one, the marketing of MUB resources to graduate students is improving but is not yet optimal. The GSS is very conscious of and commends the MUB for the steps that it has already taken to reach out to the graduate student community (including, among other things, the hiring of a GA position in the Fall 2013 semester to serve as a liaison between the MUB and the graduate student body). The website "Inside Track" is another step in the right direction, though it also must be noted that very few in the GSS have heard of it. However, the GSS feels that additional outreach is needed in the years ahead. This might partly be addressed by more advertizing for the "Inside Track" website, having the MUB's GA liaison sit on the GSS Programming Committee, and producing an annual graduate student guide to MUB resources and events each autumn.

A second concern that came up revolved around graduate student mandatory fees being used to subsidize the Granite Square Station mail service, which appears to be mostly used by undergraduate students. While it is true that 359 graduate students have mailboxes at the MUB, the consensus in the Senate this year as well as last year was that graduate student use of the mailboxes was not wide enough to merit the entire graduate student body supporting that service. Most graduate students either live off-campus or in on-campus facilities that already have mail service, and many TA and RAs have mailboxes within their home departments. What's more, more affordable PO boxes are available to rent at the Durham Post Office. **If it would result in**

#### Graduate Student Senate

**reducing the overall graduate student MUB fee**, the Senate would therefore like to see a pay per use system put in place for graduate students renting mailboxes at Granite Square Station.

The Senate's narrow approval of the mandatory nature for the Health Services fee is also noteworthy. **As the vote suggests, graduate student opinion was divided on this front.** A few voices opined that access to Health Services might be made an optional service for those who have and are happy with their external health insurance plans and their doctors. This would involve some sort of safeguard system to ensure that graduate students who did not pay the fee are not then freeloading on the services provided by Health Services. Other voices felt that Health Services provided useful services to graduate students and that its fee ought to remain mandatory. As was noted during the GSS's meeting with the auxiliary unit directors on November 12, 2014, having better data on graduate student usage of Health Services would also aid our deliberations on this matter.

**The GSS approved the mandatory nature and the fee changes for the Counseling Center, Transportation Services, SHARPP, and Technology.** Graduate students often make use of these services in high numbers and are overall satisfied with the value they receive in return for their financial support. The same goes for Housing and Dining Services, two auxiliary units that consistently deliver high quality services for competitive cost. The voluntary nature of these resources, of course, goes a long way towards graduate student approval.

**Despite these approvals, the Senate remains concerned about the lack of incentives for auxiliary units to maintain or even decrease their fees.** Rather, it appears that a university-wide culture permits auxiliary units to annually raise their fees so long as the change remains at or under a limit set by the University administration (usually around 2.5-3%). While we acknowledge some increasing costs are associated with Responsibility Centered Management (RCM) and understand increases to salaries and benefits, we feel that the current culture does very little to motivate auxiliary units to continually reassess their services and push to reduce fees when able. For instance, the maintenance of the current level of the Health Services fee provoked some voting members to wonder why Health Services could not have gone a step further and actually decreased its fee. We realize that the auxiliary units were unable to provide their FY 2016 budgets for the GSS to review on account of delays higher up in the University System. This meant that the GSS simply did not have access to the budgetary information that past Senates have had, which in turn prevented the Senate from vetting auxiliary budgets line by line. This made some fee changes (or lack of changes) appear arbitrary. The Senate looks forward to next year's fee oversight process when that level of investigation can be renewed.

Additionally, **the Senate would like to commend the administration, the auxiliary directors, and their staff for their helpfulness in this fee oversight process.** Vice President Mark Rubinstein consistently reached out to the GSS leadership during this process and has also been responsive to our questions and concerns. We are also grateful to him and to UNH Finance Director Kerry Scala for organizing a presentation on university finances on December 1, 2014.

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We hope that tradition continues. We are grateful to the auxiliary directors for attending our marathon fee oversight meeting on November 12, 2014, especially as this meeting had to be scheduled without much notice, and for coming prepared to answer our questions. **On behalf of the graduate student body, the GSS thanks the auxiliary directors for all of their hard work and service.**

**Moving forward**, the GSS encourages the UNH administration to consider having Campus Recreation join Housing and Dining Services as an optional fee. We also request that Campus Recreation and Health Services gather more data on graduate student usage of their units to use in future fee oversight processes and discussions. Finally, while we recognize the fiduciary constraints that auxiliary directors labor under, the GSS urges the UNH administration to find ways to incentivize auxiliary units for maintaining or decreasing their fees. **Working together as a common university community, it is our hope that we can make progress on keeping the cost of graduate education affordable and accessible for all.**

Thanks and sincerely yours,

The UNH Graduate Student Senate

Michael Verney, President

Mica Kurtz, Vice President

Kelly Nifong, Clerk

Tobi Afolayan, External Affairs Officer

Madhav Baral, Treasurer

Timothy Roemer, Programs Coordinator

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**Table 1: Motions to Approve that Auxiliary Unit Fees be Mandatory (or, for Housing and Dining, that last year's rates be approved):**

<b>Auxiliary Unit</b>	<b>Yeas</b>	<b>Nays</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>	<b>Motion</b>
Campus Recreation	1	14	1	Rejected
MUB	15	0	1	Approved
Health Services	8	6	2	Approved
Counseling Center	16	0	0	Approved
Transportation Services	16	0	0	Approved
Dining Services	13	0	3	Approved
Housing Services	12	1	3	Approved
SHARPP	15	0	1	Approved
Technology	13	3	0	Approved

**Table 2: Motions to Approve Proposed Auxiliary Unit Fee Changes for FY 2016:**

<b>Auxiliary Unit</b>	<b>Yeas</b>	<b>Nays</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>	<b>Motion</b>
Campus Recreation	6	10	0	Rejected
MUB	7	9	0	Rejected
Health Services	12	2	2	Approved
Counseling Center	11	4	1	Approved
Transportation Services	10	4	2	Approved
Dining Services	9	5	2	Approved
Housing Services	12	1	3	Approved
SHARPP	14	1	1	Approved
Technology	9	6	1	Approved