GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE
SENATE SESSION GF-16
November 6th, 2016

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. GF16-26

AS INTRODUCED
A Senatorial Resolution Regarding the negative impact of Mandatory Fees on Graduate Assistants at the University of Oklahoma

Whereas: Results from a 2016 survey of 390 graduate students at the University of Oklahoma (OU) found that 64% of respondents had 100% tuition covered because of graduate or research assistanastships1.

Whereas: Of these graduate students with full tuition coverage, 5% (13) reported a monthly stipend of $500-$1,000 a month, 55% (142) reported a monthly stipend of $1,000 - $1,500 a month, and 40% (105) reported a monthly stipend that exceeded $1,500 a month1.

Whereas: The 2015 estimated annual living wage for one adult in Norman, Oklahoma was $20,522, or $1,710 a month2.

Whereas: Respondents reported that mandatory fees for OU graduate programs cost them, on average, $452.75 a month1.

Whereas: Of these graduate students receiving stipends, 58% reported a net loss of $176.00 a month on average, ranging from $143.00 - $600.00 net loss per month1.

Whereas: Compared with other graduate programs in the state of Oklahoma, OU has the highest mandatory fees3. OU’s fees are $28.00 more per credit hour for graduate programs than Oklahoma State University4, and $40.30 more per credit hour for graduate programs than the University of Oklahoma Health Science Center5.

Whereas: Responses to the survey indicated that mandatory fees are causing financial stress for graduate students1.

"The mandatory fees are an additional source of financial stress."

"The federal poverty line cutoff is $11,800 a year. My stipend is $12,000. [Fees] put me below the poverty line."

"I have had financial difficulty even with the relatively low cost of living due to exorbitant fees."

"I do not have any other income except my [stipend]; I have difficulties to maintain my daily expenses."
"We live in family housing on campus. The rent of $665 is slightly over 50% of my income. If a student can't live on campus for a reasonable sum, they can't afford to go to school."

Whereas: Responses to the survey indicated the financial stress associated with mandatory fees is having a negative impact on the ability of graduate students to complete their assigned duties:

"I enjoy many of the benefits of the fees… I understand the importance of recruiting faculty and maintaining a working university. However, as a graduate student, the exorbitant fees can create stress on my finances, which strains my ability to perform as a student, in research, and in teaching."

"I have thought of quitting my doctoral work because of [financial anxiety]."

"Ultimately [fees] cause a lot of stress, hurts my academic and scholarly production."

"My doctoral work is suffering from how much time I have to spend [paying off my fees]."

"I have not been able to save to go on research trips. I ended up working 50-60 hours instead of studying for my [comprehensive exams]."

"As a result of these fees, I have trouble paying bills and completing research."

"If there was no fee, or at least it was less, we could focus more on our study and research rather than just be worried about this fee."

"The fees add up very quickly for students on a graduate assistant salary, making it very difficult not to accrue large amount of debt to finance my education. The need to save money throughout the year to cover mandatory fees affects many financial decisions I make, including decisions… which directly affect my ability to succeed in my field."

"I have had trouble impressing my department since I am hardly around and working one or two part time jobs at a time. As a result I have not received any teaching position nor consideration for scholarships. The flip side is that I am leaving here almost debt free. If I could choose all over again, I would not have come here because of the fees."

Whereas: Responses to the survey indicated that the financial stress associated with mandatory fees may be contributing to graduate students reconsidering the pursuit of the graduate program at OU:

"The fees [at OU] are outrageously high in comparison to other graduate schools and this may lead me to go elsewhere for my PhD."

"The stipend was competitive compared to other universities, but fees are nearly $4,000 a year. Had I known that this was the case, I may have chosen another program."

"Mandatory fees have negatively contributed to my experience as a graduate student. High student fees… would have changed my decision of which school I attended."

"My overall experience at the University of Oklahoma is positive, I enjoy the faculty and the atmosphere. The student fees are one of the sore spots for me as the past two universities [I attended] were half and a quarter of what they are at OU. The student fees [are for the

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same quality as other universities] for double the price.”

“[OU] runs the risk of losing high-caliber students in the future.”

“Because of the high fees, I would not recommend this university to other graduate students.”

“The fees are too expensive. I wouldn’t have come to OU if I had understood the fees would take away about $5,000 from my income per year.”

“Frankly, if I had known how much these fees were going to be—I was unable to find out before committing—I might have considered going [elsewhere].”

“I love it here, but the fees are a crutch that is hard for a grad student to cover given the amount of stipend money we receive. To be $10,000 in debt for pursuing a PhD seems to be unfortunate, and gives an implication towards the value administration places on its students furthering their education.”

Whereas: The ‘Academic Excellence Fee’ supports the cost of faculty, their research and their research assistants.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE THEREIN THAT:

Section 1: The Graduate Student Senate, on behalf of the graduate student body of the University of Oklahoma urge the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents and President David Boren to decrease mandatory fees for graduate assistants and research assistants at the University of Oklahoma.

Section 2: The above mentioned bodies of the University of Oklahoma Student Government Association, on behalf of the graduate student body, recommend that graduate assistants and research assistants not be charged the per credit hour ‘Academic Excellence Fee’ as they are a beneficiary of that fee.

Section 3: The above mentioned bodies of the University of Oklahoma Student Government Association, on behalf of the graduate student body, recommend that graduate students at the University of Oklahoma not be charged per credit hour mandatory fees for dissertation/thesis credit hours, independent study credit hours, internship credit hours, or directed reading credit hours.

Section 4: Copies of this resolution will be sent to:

President David Boren, University of Oklahoma
University of Oklahoma Board of Regents
Dr. Randall S. Hawes, Dean of Graduate College at University of Oklahoma
Dr. Kyle Harper, Senior Vice President and Provost

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Section 5: References:

Authors: Jennifer Russell, Graduate Student Senate Secretary
Alessio Mancini, Graduate Student Senate Senator

Co-Sponsor: Carrie Pavlowsky, Graduate Student Senate Chair

Submitted on a motion by: Senator Bill, seconded by Senator Rani
Action taken by Senate: Passed by unanimous consent
Verified by Senate Chair: [Signature] Date: 11/14/16

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