

## Statement of Autonomy

Under advisement from the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students and the representatives of the Graduate Student Congress, the Graduate Student Congress at the University of Kentucky is committed to ensuring a more equitable system of governance and is therefore issuing this Statement of Autonomy. We propose a separate autonomous organization with the following: 1) financial and legislative independence by gathering fees and decision-making power that has heretofore went to the Student Government Association (SGA) and Student Activity Board (SAB) and 2) representative authority within the University equal to that held by the SGA.

Graduate students play a number of roles that go beyond the traditional “student.” The University of Kentucky Strategic Plan for 2015-2020 highlights the place of graduate students as professionals and the central goal of the University to support this population by “[s]trengthen[ing] the quality and distinctiveness of our graduate programs to transform our students into accomplished scholars and professionals who contribute to the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world through their research and discovery, creative endeavors, teaching, and service”

([http://www.uky.edu/sotu/sites/www.uky.edu.sotu/files/2Strategic%20Plan%202015\\_2020\\_Metrics.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/sotu/sites/www.uky.edu.sotu/files/2Strategic%20Plan%202015_2020_Metrics.pdf)).<sup>1</sup>

- *Graduate students are teachers*—they may be the instructors of record in undergraduate courses or assist in the classroom by leading laboratories and discussion sessions.
- *Graduate students are researchers*—they represent the University of Kentucky by presenting their research at conferences and symposia, through the publication of their own research, and by serving as research assistants to University faculty.
- *Graduate students are active in service roles*—they have administrative duties in their service work to departmental organizations and interdisciplinary organizations like the GSC, and at times hold positions as administrators.

Thus, graduate students are never just students, but rather junior professionals tasked with guiding the educational experience of undergraduates. In this way, undergraduate student success is tied directly to graduate student success, and graduate student concerns must be addressed for them to effectively teach, guide, and mentor. Moreover, in order for graduate students to be respected as teachers, it must be clear that graduate instructors are not merely students, and this should be reflected in the organizational structure of the University. Graduate students also demonstrate the intellectual prestige of the University of Kentucky through their work as they research and publish. In order to be successful in these roles, graduate students have unique needs that must be met, including funding for conferences, research trips, and training. Attending to the needs of graduate students at the University of Kentucky benefits the entire system, and it is graduate students who best know their needs.

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<sup>1</sup> See the note from Brian A. Jackson, the Interim Dean of the Graduate School, that the “University of Kentucky (UK) Graduate School is a thriving community of scholars, researchers, and students, all dedicated to improving lives through excellence in education, research, leadership, creative work, service, and healthcare” (from <http://gradschool.uky.edu/welcome-university-kentucky>; Jackson clearly echoes the language of the University of Kentucky Mission Statement, found at <http://www.uky.edu/sotu/2015-2020-strategic-plan#UK%20Mission>). See also the University of Kentucky Graduate School website (<http://gradschool.uky.edu/types-assistantships>) for a description of types of roles graduate students play through assistantships.

We do not believe that the Student Government Association can effectively represent undergraduate and graduate students together when the needs of both are so significant and disparate. In our current system, all graduate student organizations, including the graduate student governing body, are housed under the undergraduate-led Student Government Association (SGA). This body is responsible for allocating all student government funds, representing all students at all major levels in the University, creating student policy and programming, and passing all official student legislation. While there are positions allocated to graduate students on the SGA, the total composition of graduate students on the SGA has been less than four percent, whereas graduate students comprise approximately sixteen percent of the fee-paying student body. Additionally, these positions are not reserved exclusively for graduate students, and most of the seats have been held by professional students who, in addition to these seats, retain their own representation through their professional colleges. Therefore, the claim that the current system has successfully represented all students on the campus of the University of Kentucky is simply inaccurate.

While the mission of the Student Activities Board (SAB) is to provide students with entertaining, educational, and/or enriching programs reflective of contemporary issues, most of the programming they provide is directed toward undergraduate students. Few activities are directed toward the personal and professional interests of graduate students, and even fewer are family-friendly. More importantly, graduate students are naturally apprehensive about spending leisure and casual time at events where they might encounter student they teach. These events blur the professional line vital for teachers and mentors, so few graduate students attend them.

Seventy-two percent of our benchmark institutions, more than half of the schools in the SEC, and all Ivy League schools have independent graduate student governing bodies. These schools recognize the inherent limitations of a single organization representing the diverse needs of different types of students, and the ethical and logistical challenges that arise when asking an individual group like the SGA or SAB to perform these tasks. These universities maintain autonomous graduate student organizations with full control over a proportional amount of their Student Government Association fees and Student Activity fees, and as a result, their graduate students have retained equitable representation and judicious allocation of funding.

Even as an autonomous organization, we remain committed to working with the SGA to create a strong intergovernmental relationship that will work for the good of all students at UK. We believe that working on the issues most pertinent to our respective populations—undergraduate and graduate—will allow all of us to be more effective advocates and leaders for students on campus.

The Executive Board of the Graduate Student Congress

*Kaylynne Glover, President*

*Anna Bedsole, Vice-President*

*John Terbot, Secretary*

*Valerie Stevens, Committee Coordinator*

*Luc Dunoyer, IT Director*

*Mitchell Richmond, Senator-at-Large*

Ratified 12/7/2017