

Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Education Funding
12/2/13

Due to a widespread impression amongst faculty that funding for Graduate Education had undergone a significant decline over the previous 2 fiscal years, the Senate Council organized a committee in March, 2013 to investigate the issues. The committee included the following members: David Berry (Psychology), Mark Coyne (Plant and Soil Sciences), Norman Fox (Graduate Student Congress), Abhijit Patwardhan (Biomedical Engineering), Joe Springer (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation), Connie Wood (Statistics), and Dave Ziebert (Accountancy).

The committee was charged by the Senate Council with addressing the following issues:

The Senate Council shall establish an Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Education Funding. The purpose of this committee is two-fold: i.) to accurately determine the 2013-2014 allocation for graduate fellowships and scholarships and to compare this with funding levels in previous years and ii.) to make recommendations to the Senate Council regarding the future level of funding for graduate education.

The committee shall be chaired by one of the five appointed University Faculty members and a representative from the Graduate Student Congress. The Ad Hoc Committee is specifically charged to:

1. Collect data on the trends in the availability of fellowships, scholarships, and other graduate student support.
2. Determine the UK Administration's short and medium term plans for graduate education.
3. Survey Directors of Graduate Studies and other researchers regarding the role of graduate education in their disciplines and the importance of funding for graduate student success.
4. Provide the Senate Council with a data-driven report on the current status of graduate student funding and, if necessary, suggest possible modifications of current resource allocations for the Senate to endorse.

In order to investigate these issues, the committee met with several administrators, as detailed below:

Jeannine Blackwell, Dean of the Graduate School as well as Lisa Wilson, Associate Provost for Finance & Operations (April 2 and June 20, 2013); Tim Tracy, Interim Provost (April 30, 2013); Christine Riordan, Provost as well as Lisa Wilson, Associate Provost for Finance & Operations (October 30, 2013).

Results and conclusions from these meetings are summarized in several sections below.

Trends on Availability of Fellowships, etc.

The committee included 5 Directors of Graduate Studies from multiple colleges, all of whom shared the strong impression of a recent significant decrease in funds supporting graduate education, particularly the Reedy Quality Achievement Fellowships and Multi-Year Fellowships which have been particularly important in the past for recruiting the highest quality graduate students to programs at the University.

Data on trends in funding for graduate education were requested from the Graduate School and provided to the committee. Following are 2 spreadsheets provided by the Graduate School. The first is a spreadsheet providing data on expenditures and sources of funding for Graduate Education over the most recent 5 years. The second spreadsheet is a count of various fellowships awarded over recent years. Unfortunately, careful review of these data raised more questions than answers. For example, the consistent increase in overall funding for graduate education seemed directly contradicted by committee members' own experiences with decreased Fellowship support for their programs. The committee also noted that there had been substantial fluctuations in the level of Fellowship funding across the 10-11, 11-12, and 12-13 academic years.

As noted earlier, the committee met with Dean Blackwell, Provost Riordan, and budget officers to gain their perspectives on faculty's' perception of reduced graduate funding. Both Dean Blackwell and Provost Riordan characterized the change in funding for Graduate Education in 2012-2013 as the result of a "perfect storm". The factors that decreased funds for this purpose included a 7.7% cut to the Graduate School Budget, previous overspending on Tuition Scholarships approximating \$660,000, and significantly reduced revenue from endowment accounts supporting fellowships due to market downturns. In the future, each College will be asked to allocate 2 – 3 % of income to a savings account for unexpected financial circumstances, as will Central Administration.

Overall, the committee did not feel that it obtained a clear understanding of past funding levels or a firm grasp of projected future funding levels for Graduate Education.

Administration's Short and Medium-Term Plans for Graduate Education

As is widely appreciated across campus at present, the introduction of the new RCM budget model has created great uncertainty about future budgeting. Thus, no administrators were able to make any definitive statements regarding upcoming funding for Graduate Education.

That being said, as indicated on the webpage for the Office of the Provost : http://www.uky.edu/Provost/FinancialModel/files/Education_Training/Training_Presentation_v8.pdf, the RCM funding model does provide continuing support for tuition scholarships and fellowships which will be administered by the Graduate School. Colleges will be given credit for 25% of the tuition, including tuition scholarships, generated by their graduate students (75% will go the College of the instructor). Then, Colleges will be assessed a “tax” proportional to their total student credit hour production to support these funding commitments. Unfortunately, tuition for graduate students, both actual revenue and tuition scholarships, are in the base for the Strategic Initiatives Fund (SIF), which currently is being ‘taxed’ at a rate of 20%. Therefore, even if the total generated tuition balances out the ‘tax’ the Colleges pay back to the Graduate School, the Colleges have to fund the 20% SIF tax from other sources. This represents a substantial new cost for supporting RAs, TAs, and GAs and has the potential to undermine graduate education and research.

Committee members expressed several concerns about the possible impact of the new budget model. One involved the issue of providing Deans additional authority in allocating funds within their respective colleges and the potential for negative repercussions on graduate education. It is clear that the Provost will not and should not micromanage the decisions of the Deans in the various colleges with respect to the use of tuition dollars. However, the committee felt that some level of oversight needs to be in place to ensure a healthy financial future for graduate education. Another issue was the need of graduate programs to have financial stability across prospective 5 year periods for recruiting and ongoing support of graduate students. It is not clear how the RCM model will allow for this prospective stability.

Survey of Directors of Graduate Studies

During Summer, 2013, 107 DGSs were emailed a link to a survey requesting their input on the impact of recent cuts to funding for graduate education. The response rate was approximately 56%. The survey requested 2 ratings and further invited open-ended response to 3 queries. Results for the first 2 appear below.

1) Last October, a reduction in funding for fellowships was announced. How has this impacted your ability to recruit quality applicants?

Response	Frequency	Percent

Very Negatively	8	13.33
Negatively	39	65.00
Not at all	13	21.67
Positively	0	
Very Positively	0	

2) How have the reductions in the number of Deans Scholarships for tuition impacted your ability to support current and incoming graduate students?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very Negatively	9	15.00
Negatively	31	51.67
Not at all	20	33.33
Positively	0	
Very Positively	0	

As may be readily appreciated, DGSs were very concerned about the impact of these cuts on their ability to recruit and support the most competitive graduate students. If anything, the open response comments were even more explicitly negative about the effects of funding reductions. One clear concern that was expressed is how the various programs are going to be able to plan in terms of the number of future commitments.

Current Status of Graduate Funding and Suggested Modifications

As previously noted, definitive data on current funding for graduate education are not yet available. This has turned out to be a surprisingly complicated question, as funding comes from multiple sources across campus, including UKRF, Core Accounts, and accounts administered by the Graduate School. Overall, as the committee grappled with this question, it appeared more and more like the proverbial Gordian Knot. It is possible that tracking support for graduate students will be more straightforward under the new budget model.

In order to monitor this situation on an ongoing basis, it is recommended that the Senate committee on Research and Graduate Education identify and/or promote a process for ensuring that appropriate tuition dollars are allocated for graduate education at the College level, request from the Provost regular (annual?) updates on funding, and advocate for graduate training as needed.