Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

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General Comments/Arguments:

GAPSA contends that the “value neutral” Regent’s Policy guiding the Student Services Fees application process has been breached beyond repair for the current year. We are deeply concerned with this year’s process, after two previous years of participating in this process in a way that seemed fair and straightforward, the contrast is noteworthy. We also feel that the treatment of COGS’s request was quite the reverse.

We feel that the lack of context or understanding used to make these decisions was also an issue, as that most of the cuts recommended are the entire budgets of councils and student organizations in our population.

Regardless of the status of COGS, we still are the only student governance body recognized by the University for our population, and most of our board is graduate students, representing our entire graduate student population, as well as our professional students. We are the counterpart organization to other similar governance structures across the Big Ten, and our counterpart at the University is MSA. COGS is not a counterpart to MSA, whether they are part of our organization or divorced from us.

Our concern with engaging a flawed process is the reason, as we indicated, that we did not respond to the litany of questions we received from our deliberations. In our knowledge, GAPSA has never before received so many questions, including such completely biased, and pointed ones. However, in order to provide transparency despite this protest, please see the point by point appeal to the SSFC’s initial recommendations below. Also, we’ve attached the answers to the questions, if the SSFC wishes to review them.

1) GAPSA feels that the deduction of CPA Consultant is not in the best interest of the organization; nor is it congruent with the tenets of the SSFC Guidelines for Decision Making. We wish to integrate the CPA consultant into our orientation processes for incoming executive boards to assure best accounting practices. This will assure consistency in accounting practices from year to year, which should be a major concern for all student groups. The CPA consultant will also assure that agreed-upon procedures are undertaken after audits, which is in compliance with GDM 11. Our external auditor suggested that we hire this CPA as she is an expert
in nonprofit accounting and because it should not be the same person performing
the audits. This is a best practice in fiscal stewardship. We are not sure why the
Fees Committee would defund.

2) The Campus Club membership of $350 annually is nominal compared with the
cost savings of accessing Campus Club space for (even one large or two smaller)
programming event(s) or meeting(s) annually. We have also held several small
meetings and gatherings of the Executive Board and Assembly committees, and to
host guests on campus, for free space cost because we are members. For example,
when David Wiley came to campus, we bought him lunch at the Campus Club to
meet with faculty and members, just before he had to speak downstairs in Coffman
Theatre. Membership is not purchased, or even accessible, for personal use by
Assembly or Executive Board members. The policies of the Campus Club
membership restrict personal use, so that justification in the fees statement
prepared by SSFC does not make sense.

3) In order to conduct daily business and provide programming and services for
all graduate and professional students, GAPSA must have a supply budget. The ask
of $7200 for FY 2014-2015 is actually a reduct for what we are approved to spend
in 2013-2014 ($8000). The amount projected is an extrapolation from the current
rate of spending, which could contain uncertainty. We went through a move and
joined spaces with MSA. The full repercussions of shared space is not yet realized
as we have only been doing so for less than 1 year. A REDUCTION from $8000 to
$7200 will set a precedent for cost savings while allowing room for unforeseen
expenses until GAPSA can get a handle on shared supplies with MSA.

Many graduate and professional students do not lead a traditional student
lifestyles. Many have off-campus jobs or travel extensively for research. The
$1500 parking reimbursement is to ensure that student leaders are not overly
burdened by parking fees by attending important meetings (up to $10-$15 per
day, depending on the number of meetings).

These meetings are often mission critical, or requested by University
Administration, and the outcomes of which go on to help all graduate and
professional students in the University system. In our experience, 1pm is the
average time requested for meetings by University administration and staff,
which is often an impossible time to bus to campus in the middle of the day and
also get back and forth to work off campus. Involvement for graduate and
professional students (many of whom are professionals with full time or part time
jobs or internships) should not be limited to those with on campus work. Parents,
which many of our students are, for example, are more excluded from participation
when they have to take on additional costs such as parking.

Additionally, our Representatives to the Board of Regents are required to miss 2
full days of class/work, once per month, as well as many other hours that are put
into docket review and preparation of the Fall and Spring reports. These reports
require extensive research and meetings. In order to attract the best students, it is necessary to provide incentives and help offset the cost of missed work hours. The need for Data Record Services is to fill the need of keeping 5 years of financial records on file, off-site, that are automatically shred as new records are added. This is in accordance with being a recognized non-profit. Operating costs are an essential component to any organization and our request is in the spirit of GDM 2.

4) The President’s Reception is an annual, historic event for GAPSA’s annual programming. When we started as leadership, we were also concerned at the typical expense of the event. Based on qualitative feedback from our student body survey, council focus groups, and individual interviews with previous officers, we decided to instead imbue meaning into the event, by recognizing positive culture changes related to advising, and now excellence in graduate student teaching. We also found that the food and space reservation costs are typical for on campus events of that type. In the past the event has sometimes been a full, sit down dinner. We decided to scale back to appetizers and a cash bar to save money and make it more of a networking event, which again, our student body requested of us.

At the time the proposal was initially being drafted GAPSA did expect around 200 people at the event this year because that’s close to what we got last year. However, unfortunately we had only half that number sign up, with some students attending that did not sign up, despite increasing outreach. The previous year we had a much larger attendance number as indicated. Unfortunately, there was an error made, and no projected number was indicated in the budget sheet. GAPSA does expect a much larger attendance number (200) next year, based on historic attendance, and because the Graduate School Dean was thoroughly impressed by the event, and has offered to help promote it next year. The Provost is also a co-sponsor of the event.

The President’s Reception represents one of the few mechanisms for graduate and professional students to directly engage University leaders, including the president. In order to provide more substance to the event, we have dovetailed it with our adviser and graduate teaching awards. GAPSA (not COGS) is the counterpart to MSA. COGS has voted down our offer to co-sponsor award, so we are seeking independent funds to support this partnership with MSA. MSA requested that we cosponsor the Grad Teaching Award with them, and we decided to incorporate this into the President’s Reception, in order to give more meaning to the event. That’s what the $1,000 would be used for in this case, to reward excellent graduate student TAs.

The Council Passthrough, and Graduate and Professional Appreciation Week funding (which is an annual event sponsored by us, and GAPSA-type bodies in Universities nationwide), represent the entire budget for many of our constituent councils. We find this deduction in direct service money to large portions of our student body without precedent or justification, and
extremely alarming. It indicates to us a lack of understanding of the SSFC’s responsibilities to the University and our Student Body. It lacks historical context and need.

Our grants program is historically, and with the exception of our passthrough, the most direct service aspect of our budget. **Our Small Event and Social Grants are often the primary budget option for student organizations in our population.** These grants help bring in experts to speak at the University, which provides opportunities to learn to all graduate and professional students. Academic Grants are a huge necessity to our students pursuing academic track jobs, who need to present nationally and internationally at conferences, or for professional, traditional career-focused students, to attend conferences to network professionally and gain skills and contacts.

In other words, our grant funding is of the most direct benefit to our students. We have a ton of positive qualitative feedback that speaks to this fact. These grants help supplement the training provided by the University’s degree programs in the most obvious way. Again, we feel that the SSFC decision to defund this aspect of our budget has been made without context, and is alarming and damaging to our organization, and our students. We strongly protest the decisions of the SSFC, and find your vote on this point to be without merit, and harmful to our student body.

5) GAPSA Forum is where the agenda for the entire year is formulated and planned. We bring in speakers and experts on crucial issues facing all graduate and professional students, as well as higher education in general. The work done on the resolutions set by GAPSA go on to affect nearly all students, whether they participate in GAPSA, or not. Furthermore, the active role that GAPSA plays in advocating for the University, which is planned in the GAPSA Forum, is realized as a benefit for this entire institution. GAPSA Forum represents a collaborative “space” where cross-discipline ideas are communicated and learned. This aligns with GDM’s 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.