

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 5, 2017

TO: Victor Wilson  
Vice President for Student Affairs

FROM: Michael Snell  
President, Graduate-Professional Student Association

SUBJECT: Proposal for a Modified Student Activity Fee Allocation Process

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The purpose of the Student Activity Fee (SAF; [http://www.bursar.uga.edu/mandatory\\_fee\\_policy.pdf](http://www.bursar.uga.edu/mandatory_fee_policy.pdf), see “Bundled Student Package”) is to “[support] student programming and operational expenses associated with the programs and services to enhance all aspects of student life at UGA.” Recommendations for the allocation of revenue generated through the assessment of the Student Activity Fee are submitted to the Vice President for Student Affairs approximately 3 months prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. Policies guiding the distribution and utilization of Student Activity Fee monies are maintained by the Business Office of the Tate Student Center unit of the Division of Student Affairs ([http://tate.uga.edu/business\\_content\\_page/activity-fee-guidelines](http://tate.uga.edu/business_content_page/activity-fee-guidelines)). More general policies regarding the assessment of Mandatory Student Fees are maintained by the USG Board of Regents (BoR) and published under section 7.3.2 of the BoR Policy Manual ([http://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section7/C453/#p7.3.2\\_student\\_fees\\_and\\_special\\_charges](http://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section7/C453/#p7.3.2_student_fees_and_special_charges)).

Projected SAF revenue for FY2017 amounts to \$8,515,051, with planned expenditures totaling \$8,765,186, a difference of \$250,135. Interestingly, the projected revenue amount includes a “planned” \$2,018,943 to be drawn from existing reserves, but not the additional \$250,135 in projected expenses. Therefore, to fulfill this additional financial obligation would effectively encumber the reserve \$2,269,078, diminishing the existing surplus to \$2,728,286. Assuming no increase in the level of the SAF, FY2018 projections would further deplete this surplus to \$1,486,288; it is then conceivable that, all else remaining equal, the existing reserve could be in deficit by FY2020 if no action is taken to curb revenues and/or expenses from the SAF.

Revenue generated by the SAF is divided broadly into two “pools,” one for programs and one for operational expenses. “Programs” include social and academic programming coordinated by dedicated groups within the Division of Student Affairs as well as student-led organizations and student life resources (e.g., LGBT Resource Center, Leadership and Service, etc.). “Operational expenses” include facility supplies, maintenance, and equipment costs in addition to 80 staff and administrative positions within the Division of Student Affairs. These two “pools” are conceived as helpful guiderails for the proper distribution of resources; in practice, however, there is a large degree of overlap and revenue must necessarily comingle (though BoR policies require the transfer of monies devoted to wages, salaries, and benefits from SAF accounts to designated personnel accounts).

The portion of SAF reserved for “all campus allocations” has fluctuated in recent years between about \$1.75 million and \$2.1 million, the most recent year (FY2017) seeing a total allocation of \$1,743,861. This revenue is further divided into two parts according to an enrollment formula. The first and largest part – which accounts for approximately 90% of the total – is used to fund student-led organizations which operate under the support of Student Affairs. The second part is used to fund student-led organizations which operate outside of Student Affairs, but serve students in multiple academic departments. The present proposal suggests procedural modifications for the allocation of the first of these two parts.

An “All Campus Allocation Committee” (referred to elsewhere as the “Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee”) is charged with evaluating budget proposals submitted by authorized organizations and making allocations recommendations to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Information regarding criteria for the assessment of budget proposals does not appear to be publicly available. Policies and rationale pertaining to the composition of the All Campus Allocation Committee do not appear to be publicly available. However, documents provided to the author and personal statements from numerous staff members and administrators indicate that the Committee is chaired primarily by undergraduate students, these sources being further corroborated by a statement appearing in the Mandatory Fee Request Form provided to the Office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration and considered on November 8 in a meeting of the UGA Mandatory Student Fee Committee. That statement reads, “The Student Government Association provides leadership for making funding recommendations regarding program allocations.” Undergraduate students act also as the primary beneficiaries of the portion of the SAF revenue they are charged with allocating. It is important to note at this juncture that BoR policies feature a variable and institutionally-specific usage of the phrase “student government” and that there exists no policy restricting the privilege of making allocation recommendations to undergraduate students or to a single “Student Government Association.” In fact, doing so may be *in violation of* BoR policy (BoR Policy Manual Section 7.3.2.1), which instructs institutions and student government bodies to enact measures which ensure a broad representation of students on such committees.

Again, the purpose of the committee-allocated portion of the Student Activity Fee is to support programs and services offered through the Center for Student Activities and Involvement (CSAI), and “academically related student clubs and organizations” advised through the CSAI or otherwise exist in service to students in multiple UGA academic departments. It is essential, therefore, that the process for allocating these funds be structured and systematized in a manner which reflects the characteristics of the student body which shoulders the mandated burden of the student activity fee. **At present, the allocations process severely underrepresents graduate-level students, and subsequently underfunds graduate student activities, clubs, and organizations.** The situational factors and consequences connected to this dysregulation are considered in the following section.

### **Student Activity Fee Allocation Issues and Challenges**

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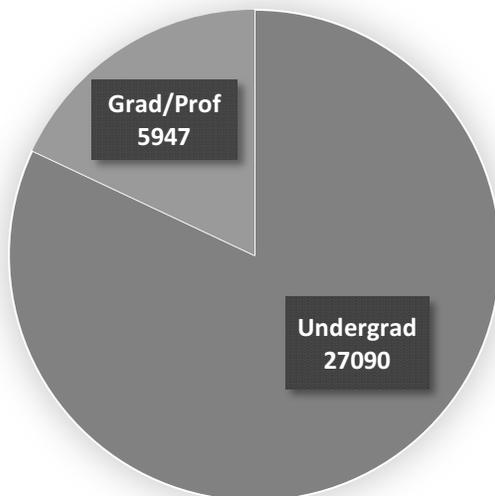
Of the combined \$156 total each fee-paying student shoulders over the course of the fall and spring semesters, only a fraction is returned in the form of support for student activities, clubs, and organizations, but this fraction differs by undergraduate versus graduate status. Data

gathered for the preparation of this proposal indicates that 33,037 UGA students were assessed the activity fee portion of the Mandatory Student Fee Package at the commencement of the Fall 2016 semester. Of these students, 27,090 are undergraduate students, with the remaining 5,947 being graduate or professional students. Expressed as a ratio, undergraduate fee-paying students outnumber graduate fee-paying students 4.5 to 1. We should expect, therefore, that a large majority of SAF revenue is allocated to specifically undergraduate student activities, clubs, and organizations, as is the case. Nevertheless, we should expect that the amount allocated per fee-paying student is relatively stable across the two student cohorts. At present, this is not the case: for every \$1.00 allocated to each student activity fee-paying graduate/professional student, over \$9.00 is allocated to each fee-paying undergraduate student. Graduate and professional students contribute just over 18% (approx. \$927,000 for fall and spring, combined) of the total revenue generated by the Student Activity Fee, but graduate student activities and organizations receive under 2.3% (<\$40,000) as funding through the All Campus Allocations process. This sends a counterintuitive message to students – that all students should be treated equally when fees are assessed, but not when the revenues from those fees are allocated.

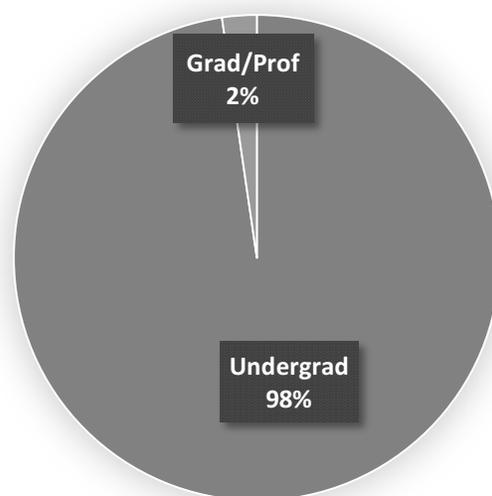
Additionally, it has come to the attention of the GPSA that the SAF allocation process for FY2017, with regard to SGA and GPSA funding, failed to apply the enrollment formula for student government funding which had been applied in years past. No mention or justification of this evasion appears in the recommendation document produced by the allocations committee. The result was nonetheless devastating to GPSA’s ability to fund programs and initiatives, forcing graduate students – who already were encumbered by heavy teaching and research workloads – to spend excessive amounts of time lobbying for financial support from other campus units.

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### Students Paying Fees

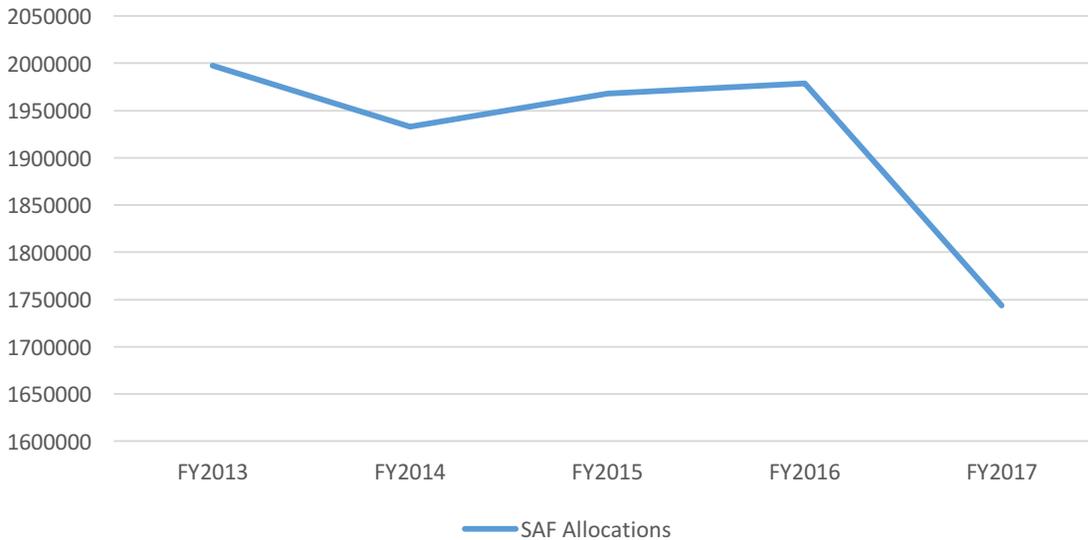


### Dollars Allocated



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Total Amount Allocated: All Campus Allocations FY2013-17



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These practices ultimately counteract UGA’s own efforts to increase alumni engagement and attract exceptionally qualified prospective students. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that UGA’s high mandatory student fees dissuade many highly qualified prospective students from applying or attending. For these exceptional candidates, there are more affordable, more competitive opportunities offered to them by other institutions at which mandatory student fees are either lower, wholly subsidized, or nonexistent. For those students who are willing or have no option but to encumber this cost at UGA, there is little demonstrable evidence we can give them that the fees they pay provide the same level of benefit as is provided to undergraduate students who pay the same amount.

The Graduate-Professional Student Association is a representative body of the University’s approximately 8,500 graduate and professional students. Its mission to “build, support, and illuminate” a vibrant and inclusive graduate and professional student community is consistent with the University’s mission “to teach, to serve, and to inquire,” and is accomplished through the shared efforts of the University’s students, faculty, staff, and administration. Graduate and professional students serve in a wealth of capacities that are essential to the functioning of the university and contribute greatly to the quality of its programs and services. They are researchers, instructors, mentors, managers, and caregivers, and they deserve programs that enhance their experience as students and further empower them to be effective in the many roles in which they function.

### **Summary**

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With regard to the Student Activity Fee allocations process, the following questions might be considered: Do graduate students feel a part of this campus? How do graduate assistants perceive

their role in delivering the missions of the university? In what ways should the university foster the graduate student community? Are existing programs and services inclusive of graduate students? While these questions extend beyond merely the Student Activity Fee and are germane to conversations regarding graduate and professional student experiences throughout UGA, they are of particular import within the Division of Student Affairs.

The primary challenge underlying this issue and other related issues is one of shared governance. It is not clear that shared governance mechanisms are adequately equipped to address the specific issues at hand, for the following reasons: **(i)** These issues have accrued over years, are numerous and multifaceted, and concern both pressing and basic needs of graduate students and of graduate student employees. **(ii)** Shared governance mechanisms are heavily composed of administrators who have decades of experience working within a bureaucracy, which allows them to prioritize their own items of concern over those expressed by students. **(iii)** Structures (both internal and external to shared governance groups) do not exist to allow appointed students to get the feedback from their student body that is necessary to truly represent the issues of that student body. So, while shared governance is a vital part of the student relationship with administration, it is not clear that shared governance, alone, offers an adequate solution to the issues outlined by the GPSA. At present, these issues weigh more negatively on graduate and professional students than any other group of student stakeholders at UGA.

Stated plainly, many of the shared governance mechanisms at UGA, including All Campus Allocations, are discriminatory against graduate and professional students, who are left disadvantaged in terms of representation on the governing and policy-making bodies, committees, and task groups which influence the quality of student experiences at UGA. Universities are local democracies, not corporations. However, students - regardless of graduate versus undergraduate status – are always disadvantaged in gaining institutional knowledge. It is therefore prudent and necessary for us to give them a little bit more so that we, as a university, get more back. We must work together to ensure that the silent complacency toward keeping things the way they are does not become discriminatory or misrepresentative.

Having reviewed the UGA graduate and professional student experience as a whole, and best practices in graduate education, and being mindful of the current resources available for new activities, the GPSA is expected to prioritize recommendations necessary to improve the graduate student experience at UGA and meet the goals conveyed in UGA's Strategic Plan 2020.

**It is with this responsibility that GPSA, representing UGA's graduate and professional student bodies, recommends the sanctioning of a "Graduate Student Activity Allocations" process, to be administered by student representatives of graduate and professional student programs with advisement from the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, and the Director of Student Activities.** The amount allocated by this committee is recommended to be in direct proportion to the amount of SAF revenue encumbered by graduate and professional students in a given year, relative to undergraduate students. For example, in FY2017, student government representatives allocated \$1,560,373 of the \$1,743,861 in funding for campus programs and activities (the remaining reserved for school and college committees, as previously stated). The projected total SAF revenue for FY2017 (including the reserve amount to be used) is \$8,515,051, bringing the amount allocated by student government representatives

to roughly 18.3% of the grand total. If we extract from this amount the approximately 18% of SAF shouldered by graduate students, the amount allocated to graduate student activities and programs should be roughly \$280,851. After accounting for those programs for which there are benefits shared by both graduate and undergraduate students, a total of \$169,774 should be allocated by “Graduate Student Activity Allocations” to specifically graduate student programs and activities, with shared student governance (both undergraduate and graduate students) guiding the utilization of the remaining \$111,076.

This modification is intended to achieve the dual purpose of:

- 1. Improving support structures for graduate and professional students**
- 2. Improving and promoting graduate education culture at UGA**

Continued collaboration between students and administration is critical to achieving these broader aspirations for the UGA community, and is essential that the conversation continue to grow and that potential challenges, priorities, and solutions continue to be identified, especially by those who serve in positions of influence. We must work together to “build, support, and illuminate” a strong, vibrant, and inclusive community at all levels of the university community, now and in the future.

