



Graduate School
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TO: Dr. Alan T. Dorsey, Dean of the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences
Dr. DeLoris Hesse, President of the Franklin Senate

FROM: Dr. Ron R. Walcott, Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate School

RE: Information on the Special Institutional Fee

DATE: March 18, 2021

I have recently been made aware that the Franklin Senate will be considering a resolution in support of the Graduate Student Association's stance on the University of Georgia's Special Institutional Fee (SIF) at its meeting on March 23, 2021. In my role as Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School, I feel it is essential that you understand the significance of the SIF to the University's operating budget, as well as UGA's increasing support for our graduate students, as you consider this issue. I ask that you share this memo with the members of the Franklin Senate in advance of the meeting to ensure that they are also fully informed.

First and foremost, the University of Georgia (UGA) deeply values our graduate students and recognizes the contributions they make to UGA's academic excellence. UGA's research, instructional, and service missions benefit directly from their efforts.

Because the University is committed to building a thriving graduate education community, we are constantly seeking to enhance the quality of the experience for our students. For example, UGA has increased the graduate stipend rates by an average of 2-5% per year in six of the past seven years. (Unfortunately, we were not able to increase these rates in the FY21 budget due to the severe financial challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting 10% reduction to our state budget.) In FY15 and FY18, this increase was greater than the average increase pool for UGA faculty and staff. Since academic year 2013-14, the fiscal year doctoral and master's base assistantship rates have both increased, with the doctoral rate increasing by nearly 23%, from \$46,062 to \$56,613. These past increases have totaled nearly \$6 million in additional funding provided directly for the benefit of our graduate students. During this same time period, total mandatory fees have increased from \$1,117 per semester to \$1,145, an increase of only \$28 or less than 0.4% annually. Tuition and fees have remained unchanged since Fall of 2019, and no increases in mandatory fees are proposed for the next fiscal year. In addition, UGA also eliminated all course and lab fees more than a year ago in Spring Semester 2020.

It is important to note that the President, Provost and I have been exploring several options to increase the base assistantship rate for FY22 and are committed to doing so. Thus, the level of investment we are making in our graduate students will grow even more when the base assistantship rate for FY22 increases.

Overall, more than 60% of the Graduate School's budget goes directly to supporting graduate students through assistantships, fellowships, travel awards, competitive research grants, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, in FY19 we instituted a Graduate Student Emergency Fund that has been significantly augmented by private funds from the Office of the President. Thus far, we have disbursed more than \$423,000 to address the urgent financial needs of 335 graduate students—which has been particularly helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. We plan to continue providing this resource to help defray the financial challenges faced by our graduate students. Moreover, President Morehead is in the process of providing an additional \$250,000 grant to the Graduate School to assist students in completing their degrees.

The University cannot, however, honor the request of the Graduate Student Association to eliminate the SIF. The SIF comprises an important part of the University's budget, providing roughly \$39 million in revenue annually (with about a quarter coming from graduate students) to support critical elements of our instruction and research mission. This \$39 million of annual revenue has become even more important in light of the 10% cut in state allocations to the University's FY21 budget—a reduction that removed \$42 million of state funding from our base operating budget. The SIF provides significant benefits to graduate and undergraduate students alike: specifically, eligible graduate students benefit from the 50% subsidy now provided for the Graduate Student Health Insurance premium, as well as library resources.

Benefits from the SIF accrue to all UGA students—both graduate and undergraduate, and it would be wrong to absolve one group of paying the fee while requiring it of the other. The magnitude of the impact of removing the entire fee—essentially, 4 percent of our general fund operating budget [comprised of state appropriations, tuition, fees and Indirect Cost Recovery (IDC)]—would be devastating to UGA. When compounded by the 10% reduction in FY21 state appropriations, loss of the SIF could trigger faculty and staff layoffs, reduce the number of graduate assistantships we are able to offer, increase class sizes, and harm our library operations, as well as reduce the number of support services we can provide to all our students.

The President, Provost and I believe that the best way to improve the financial standing of our graduate students is to continue to increase the rate of their graduate stipends. We have already demonstrated a strong commitment to this effort over the past seven years and will continue to do so in the coming years. We are dedicated to fostering an environment in which our graduate students can thrive.