

University Budget Committee

Minutes of Monday April 6, 2015

Members in attendance: Thomas Bontly (chair), Norma Bouchard, Janine Caira, Phillip Mannheim, James Marsden, Daniel Stolzenberg.

The meeting came to order at 4:05pm.

1. Request from the SEC to discuss the impact of admitting additional students

After considerable discussion of the impacts, the sense of the Committee is that further increasing undergraduate enrollment at this point will further erode the quality of undergraduate education.

2. GRA tuition on grants

There followed a lengthy discussion of the data obtained from the Grad School and the Budget Office regarding the impact of the policy of charging tuition on grants. The main points were these:

- The chair reminded everyone of the Committee's charge to continue monitoring the implementation and impact of the policy for another two years and report back.
- The sense of the assembled committee members was that our report should reflect the following points:
 - a. To date, no evidence has been provided that charging GRA tuition to grants would increase the total amount of grant money coming in to the University (as had been asserted at one point by the policy's chief proponent, President Hogan). Quite possibly it decreases the total amount available, by making grant proposals from our researchers less competitive and/or by moving grant dollars from lines that are subject to indirect costs (IDCs) to the line for tuition, which is not subject to IDC. However, there is insufficient data to draw any conclusions about the net effect the policy has on research funding.
 - b. Based on the cash flow, it appears that more money is being collected from tuition charges than is needed to support the purposes to which it is being put (as witnessed by the fact that \$700,000 was swept from the account to help cover the University's deficit and there is still enough left to pay for those purposes).
 - c. The policy effectively taxes successful research programs to pay for other priorities. Assuming for the sake of argument that the priorities in question are all good things to spend money on, it is unclear why money should be redirected from the research enterprise and also science graduate programs to pay for these things.
 - d. The funds collected under the policy are supposed to be used exclusively for purposes of research and graduate education. The policy is to use them to support students on national competitive fellowships, which invariably do not pay anything close to the full cost of attendance. However, (i) not all of the money is being used for this purpose, as \$700K was redirected elsewhere; (ii)

some is being used to cover dissertation fellowships and the like; (iii) most of the students supported are on training grants, not their own prestigious fellowships; and (iv) a disproportionate number appear to be in just one School (Engineering). (Note: A question was also raised during the meeting as to whether the students supported on one of these fellowships—the Bridge to the Doctorate—are all graduate students. Turns out they are, as the program only supports students enrolled in doctoral programs for their first two years. For more on B2D, see article on March 11, 2013 UConn Today article—thanks NB for bringing this article to our attention).

- e. The cost of doing research at the University is already, before the tuition charges, very high, and with unionization it is almost certain to get higher still. The tuition charges make a bad situation worse.
 - f. The tuition charges add approximately 20% to the cost of employing a GRA (about \$7500 per 20 hour GA). Whether it is more cost effective to hire a GA or a postdoc depends on numerous factors: the salary at which a postdoc has to be hired, the amount of training the GRA would need, whether the GRA's thesis project is likely to advance the work of the grant, and so on. In many instances a GA would be working an additional 40+ hours per week, unpaid, on research of his/her own and that such research also supports the goals of the grant. However, the same is true of postdocs, most of whom do not work only 40 hours. In other cases, the GA's research may have nothing to do with the grant on which he or she is working.
 - g. Anecdotally, many PIs report that they have stopped putting GRAs on their grants entirely.
 - h. The UBC is both disappointed and somewhat baffled by the difficulty in obtaining the necessary data to study the impact of the policy more directly, despite the best efforts of people in the Graduate School and Budget Office. The University's data systems are apparently not well designed to answer the types of questions we need to ask.
- Recommendations. In light of the above, the Committee recommends:
 - (1) that the tuition charge be reduced if not eliminated;
 - (2) that the Graduate School conduct a thorough review of the fellowship programs being supported by money from tuition charges;
 - (3) that the University seek to upgrade its data systems to make it easier to obtain information about the effects policy choices have on academic and research programs.
 - The Committee would like if possible to obtain additional data about (a) the actual numbers of GRAs (not just the percentages), (b) the amount which is being spent on each of these fellowships, (c) where these fellowship students are (which departments).
 - In addition, and independent of this report, we need better numbers on (a) the number of international students at the University and (b) the actual number of faculty members in various categories.
 - Finally, the chair requests that every member of the committee who works in a department that generates significant grant income try to obtain info on how the # of GAs (both grant-funded RAs and total) has changed since 2007. Please report these numbers to the chair asap.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20pm.