

Graduate Student Senate
Minutes for April 11, 2012

GSS President Todd Skelton called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in Law School Room 241. Quorum was established. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved as read.

- **PRESIDENT'S REPORT** (Todd Skelton)
 - SGA Election Report
SGA Elections were March 28-29, 2012. Amanda Sanford and Alexandra Brewer were elected President and Vice-President for GSS, respectively. The FUEL campaign won the elections for Student Body President, Vice President, and Student Services Director.
 - Graduate Travel Recommendations
A report will be circulated to representatives for comment in the coming weeks.
 - Travel Blog Launch
The blog dedicated to UT graduate student research and travel will be launched to coincide with the award letters for the summer cycle of the Travel Award. Todd will publicize the link to the blog.
 - Year-End Remarks
Todd thanked the representatives for their hard work this year. GSS made strides in improving the effectiveness and visibility of the organization and will continue to make improvements and advocate for the graduate student body.

- **VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT** (Will Gibbons)
 - 2012 Love Your Libraries 5K Fundraising Report
GSS raised \$4,100 for UT Libraries this year.
 - SGA Student Senate Report
Will provided a recap of key legislation presented this year in the Student Senate.
 - Year-End Remarks
Will thanked the representatives for their dedicated work this year.

- **COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTS**
 - Communication & Outreach**, Shelby Johnson
GSS now has Twitter and Facebook accounts. There is a Grad Student Social at the Bearden Beer Market on Thursday, April 12 at 9 p.m.

Like GSS on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/UTK-Graduate-Student-Senate/189453041095772>

Follow GSS on Twitter:

https://twitter.com/#!/UTK_GSS

-Equity & Diversity, Monique LeMieux

The Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors invited grad students to a rally regarding the 287(g) program. The rally is scheduled for Thursday, April 11 at 5:30 p.m. at the City County Building in downtown Knoxville.

The Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) invites grad students to an interest meeting on Thursday, April 19 at 11:30 a.m. in Ayres Hall Room 405. SACNAS supports underrepresented students in the STEM fields.

-Love Your Libraries 5K, Meagan Dennison

The 5K this year raised \$4,100 for UT Libraries. This money will be used to directly benefit students.

-Travel Awards, Todd Skelton for Amanda Sanford

Applications for the summer travel award are due Monday, April 16. The review committee will meet on April 18 and award letters will go out as soon as possible after the awards are reviewed.

- **OLD BUSINESS**

- Student Leave Policy

- Todd indicated that research regarding a graduate student leave policy is still being conducted and that work on the policy will continue into the next GSS administration.

- **NEW BUSINESS**

- Donation of 5K Proceeds to UT Libraries

- A motion to approve the donation of \$3,350 to the library was unanimously passed. This donation combined with \$750 in fundraising the library received directly totals \$4,100.

- Amendments to GSS Bylaws

- A motion to suspend the rules and vote on first consideration was passed because this was the last GSS meeting of the academic year, and the revisions to the GSS Bylaws were passed unanimously after Todd presented the revisions.

- Year-End Evaluation

- Todd led a discussion to assist with the GSS Transition. Topics of discussion included communication via the GSS website (<http://web.utk.edu/~gss/index.html>) and the new Facebook and Twitter accounts, acquiring representatives from a greater number of programs, increasing communication between representatives and their departments and subsequent representatives, conducting more work within GSS committees, and timing of the Graduate Student Town Hall.

- UT Residency Regulations

- Lacy Chick, a guest from the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, presented (1) a report summarizing research conducted by students within the department and (2) a position paper proposing changes to UT Residency Regulations. The report and proposal are attached hereto.

Todd Skelton adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

GREBE Report on UT's Residency Regulations

Report Purpose

GREBE, acting on behalf of the graduate students in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, would like the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to restructure its Residency Policy for graduate students to allow students who have established domicile in the state to be considered for in-state residency classification for the purpose of tuition and fees.

We believe that the current policy is too restrictive, and that restructuring the policy would be a viable step in helping the University to meet its Top 25 Quest Goal of increasing the number of graduate students.

Justification

The University of Tennessee's "Top 25 Quest" seeks to improve UT's standing in national rankings and to make UT Knoxville a Top 25 public research university. One of the three main goals, set forth by the University to meet this challenge, is to "improve graduate education, with the specific goal of increasing the number of PhDs we produce." Currently, UT Knoxville awards significantly fewer doctorate, master's, and professional degrees than most of its 27 peer and aspiration schools.

We have researched the Residency Policies of the 27 public Universities listed by the Top 25 Task Force as peer and aspiration universities, **and have found that UT's Residency Policy is much stricter for graduate students than the majority of other public Universities.** We suggest the University revise its Residency policy to align with these other institutions, and argue that by setting more reasonable residency standards the University will be more attractive for graduate students pursuing a degree at UT Knoxville.

Suggestions for Policy Change

Based on review of policies at the 27 peer and aspiration universities, we feel that University of Tennessee's rules on residency are draconian. All but **two** universities researched provide a clear and attainable way for graduate students to gain in-state residency. There are two common mechanisms to facilitate a graduate student's change in residency status: schools either provide exemptions for graduate students who hold assistantships or fellowships (12 schools; Table 1), and/or schools will evaluate a student's claim of establishing domicile in the state after 12 months of residency in the state (15 schools; Table 2).

We suggest that the University consider adding either, or both, of the following amendments to its current policy to make UT Knoxville more comparable to its peer and aspiration schools:

1. Granting Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs), or fellowship-holders In-State Residency Status for tuition **and** fee purposes;
2. Allowing graduate students to apply for in-state residency status after 12 months of living in the state of Tennessee, if they have rescinded domicile in any other

location. We suggest that the following documents could be used as proof of domicile in Tennessee:

- a. Owning or leasing residential property in the state
- b. Federal Income Tax Returns (To establish permanent address and fiscal independence)
- c. Driver's license or state ID
- d. Vehicle Registration
- e. Voter Registration
- f. Spouse who is domiciled in the state

Concluding Remarks

The University of Tennessee's residency policy for graduate students is too restrictive and is not in line with the policies of peer and aspiration institutions. We feel that a change in this policy will aid in the recruitment and retention of outstanding graduate students and will ultimately serve to promote UT Knoxville in its quest for Top 25 status.

Table 1: UT Top 25 Quest peer and aspiration group schools that provide exemptions that allow for Graduate students to acquire in-state residency status.

INSTITUTION	Are Exemptions Provided?	If Yes, what Exemptions?			
		GTA/GRA Position	Scholarship Student	Resident Spouse	Property Owner
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	No				
Current Peer Group					
Auburn University	Yes	X ¹		X	
Iowa State University	Yes	X ¹			
NC State University, Raleigh	No				
Top 25 Aspiration Group					
University of Georgia	Yes	X ²			
Clemson University	No				
Purdue University	Yes	X ³	X		
Texas A&M	Yes	X ⁴	X ⁶	X	X
University of Minnesota	Yes	X ¹	X ⁷		
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	No				
Indiana University	No				
Michigan State University	Yes	X ⁵		X	
Aspiration Group					
University of California Berkeley	No				
University of California Los Angeles	No				
University of Virginia	No				
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	Yes			X	
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	No				
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	Yes	X ¹			
University of Wisconsin, Madison	No				
University of California Davis	No				
University of California Santa Barbara	No				
University of Florida	Yes				
University of Texas, Austin	Yes	X ³			
The Ohio State University	No				
University of Maryland, College Park	Yes	X			
University of Pittsburgh	No				

¹ If GTA/GRA position is 1/4 time or greater

² GTA/GRA position must be 13 hours/week or greater.

³ Many cover all tuition and fees

⁴ GTA/GRA position is 1/2 time or greater

⁵ For fee purposes only. Departments can use tuition waiver for GTAs.

⁶ If scholarship is greater than \$1,000

⁷ If student holds a fellowship, scholarship or traineeship equivalent to ¼ time GTA/GRA position

Table 2: UT Top 25 Quest peer and aspiration schools that allow students to apply for in-state residency status after living within the state for 12 consecutive months, and the types of evidence used to establish a student’s domicile for tuition and fee purposes

INSTITUTION	Can students establish domicile, and in-state residency, after 12 month of living in state?	Acceptable Evidence for establishing domicile												
		Establishment of Financial Independence (e.g., Parental Tax Returns	Resident Spouse	State-income source	Federal Tax Document	State Tax Documents	Property ownership	Lease/Rental Agreement	State issued ID	Automobile registration	Voter registration	Finances in state banking institution	Membership in state-based organization/community	Admission to licensed profession in state
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	No													
Current Peer Group														
Auburn University	Yes	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Iowa State University	No													
NC State University, Raleigh	Yes	X		X		X	X		X	X	X		X	
Top 25 Aspiration Group														
University of Georgia	No													
Clemson University	No													
Purdue University	No													
Texas A&M	No													
University of Minnesota	No													
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	Yes	X	X			X	X	X			X	X		
Indiana University	No													
Michigan State University	No													
Aspiration Group														
University of California Berkeley	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
University of California Los Angeles	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
University of Virginia	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	No													
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	Yes	X		X		X	X		X	X	X		X	
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	Yes	X ¹	X ¹											
University of Wisconsin, Madison	Yes	X			X	X	X		X	X	X		X	
University of California Davis	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
University of California Santa Barbara	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
University of Florida	Yes	X	X		X	X								
University of Texas, Austin	Yes	X	X				X							
The Ohio State University	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
University of Maryland, College Park	No													
University of Pittsburgh	Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

¹ A married student who receives at least one half their income from a non-University, but in state, source may appeal for residency status.

Graduate Student Position on Graduate Student Finances GREBE

Introduction

We, the elected graduate representatives of the Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville would like to address the current financial status of the graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) within our department and provide rational for changes in current policies. **Primarily, we seek to alleviate the increased financial strain placed on GTAs.**

In this paper, we identify and provide historical context and current data for the five primary sources of GTA's increased financial strain. These sources are:

- 1) Student fee increases
- 2) Stagnant GTA stipends
- 3) Cost of living increases
- 4) Inability for most grad students to attain in-state resident status
- 5) Mandatory and continuous enrollment in EEB-600

Finally, we provide justification for action on alleviating these financial burdens and make suggestions for policy changes.

Sources of financial strain

1) Student fee increases

Graduate students have witnessed unprecedented fee increases over the past five years. Between the Spring 2011 and Fall 2011 semesters, **fees rose between 17 – 26% per year** (Table 1) **and currently represent between 3.5 to 7.6% of current GTA stipends** (depending on resident status and number of credit hours; Table 2).

2) Stagnant GTA Stipends

In the fall of 2011, the University of Tennessee raised the GTA stipends in 3.5% or \$600.00 whichever is greater. This mandatory raise increased EEB GTA monthly stipends by \$53.96, for a total raise of \$ 647.50. This represents the first increase in EEB graduate student stipends since 2007. While this stipend increase has assuaged the financial burden to an extent, it still falls short of increases in fees and costs of living since 2007 (see section 1 and 3).

3) Increases in cost of living

We used the US Department of Labor Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator (http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm) to compare GTA stipends and student fee burdens in 2007 to today. We found that **a GTA in 2007 earned 5.3% more when adjusted for inflation, and paid 16.2 to 34.3% less in fees than a GTA in 2011.**

4) Inability for grad students to attain in-state status

One method of alleviating fee increases is for graduate students to obtain in-state residency status. Students who are considered by the graduate school to have moved to the state solely for enrollment at UT are not granted in-state status and international students are ineligible to obtain residency at any point in their careers at UT.

In a recent survey of **2011 EEB graduate students, 85% of respondents were considered to be out-of-state residents.** Many of these students are considered residents by the state, as they, for example, own property, pay associated property taxes, hold a driver's license and vehicles registration in the state, and/or are registered to vote in Tennessee.

While 95% of EEB students surveyed consider themselves to be residents of the state of Tennessee, the university does not facilitate the change in status. **Allowing GTAs, who by all means are clearly residents of the state of Tennessee, to obtain residency status more easily would immediately lower fees for these students.**

5) Mandatory, continuous enrollment in EEB 600

All doctoral students in EEB must pass the Advancement to Candidacy Exam by the end of their 5th semester and immediately apply to the Graduate School for doctoral candidacy after passing this exam. Once a graduate student applies for candidacy, the **Graduate School requires continuous registration for Dissertation Credit Hours (EEB 600) every semester (including summer semesters).** If the student fails to do so, even after meeting the 24 credit hour requirement, (s)he will be required to back-register for the summer terms or semesters during which (s)he was not enrolled, and will have to pay fees and tuition for the credits.

This requirement imposes an additional cost to more advanced EEB doctoral students, who must pay the fees for at least 3 credits in summer after admission to Ph.D. candidacy. **Thus, current Ph.D. candidates must pay a minimum \$243.67 more per year as a reward for advancing to candidacy.** In previous years, EEB used to give a Merit Award to those students that pass the Advancement to Candidacy Exam, which served, in part, to alleviate this extra expense.

Justification for alleviating financial strain

While appreciated, this year's pay increase still falls short of the increase in student fees and cost of living since the last stipend increase in 2007. GTAs from EEB are responsible for teaching approximately 1,700 undergrad students per year.

Policy Recommendations:

- Departmental assistance for GTA's to cover fees
- Automatically award GTA's in-state residency status
- Give PhD candidates a Merit Award to cover at least summer fees after completion of Advancement to Candidacy Exams

Table 1: Five-year history of graduate student fees that EEB Graduate students are responsible for paying. This data does not include summer course registration fees, which are mandatory for graduate students who have passed their Advancement to Candidacy exams.

Graduate Fees per semester - TA/Part-time (6 credit hours)										
School Year	FEES						TOTAL FEES		% INCREASE	
	Program & Services	Health	Technology	Transportation	Facilities (Non-Resident)	Facilities (Resident)	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident
Fall 2011	162	0	72	12	192	90	438	336	17.74%	24.44%
Spring 2011	162	0	72	12	126	24	372	270	3.33%	4.65%
Fall 2010	150	0	72	12	126	24	360	258	0.00%	0.00%
2009-2010	150	0	72	12	126	24	360	258	15.38%	19.44%
2008-2009	108	0	72	12	120	24	312	216	0.00%	0.00%
2007 -2008	108	0	72	12	120	24	312	216	1.96%	2.86%
2006 - 2007	108	0	72	6	120	24	306	210		

** Part-time graduate students have the option to pay the health fee (\$81). However, this fee must be paid in full for access to the student health center.

Graduate Fees per semester - Full time (9 credit hour)										
School Year	FEES						TOTAL FEES		% INCREASE	
	Program & Services	Health	Technology	Transportation	Facilities (Non-Resident)	Facilities (Resident)	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident
Fall 2011	239	81	100	26	285	135	731	581	19.64%	26.03%
2010-2011	300	0	100	26	185	35	611	461	0.00%	0.00%
2009-2010	300	0	100	26	185	35	611	461	4.27%	13.55%
2008-2009	250	0	100	26	180	30	586	406	0.00%	0.00%
2007 -2008	250	0	100	26	180	30	586	406	1.74%	2.53%
2006 - 2007	250	0	100	16	180	30	576	396		

Table 2: A cost-of-living adjustment comparison of a GTAs finances in 2007 and 2011. The 2011 Predicted column represents the 2007 stipend and fees adjusted to current day values (i.e. what a GTA would be predicted to earn/spend based on their earnings/spending in 2007).

	2007	2011 Predicted*	2011 Actual	Percent Change **
GTA Stipend				
	\$18,500	\$20,213.38	\$19,147.50	- 5.3
GTA Annual Fees (% of stipend)				
part-time, non resident	\$612 (3.3%)	\$668.68	\$876 (4.6%)	+ 31.0
part-time, resident	\$420 (2.3%)	\$458.90	\$672 (3.5%)	+ 46.4
full-time, non resident	\$1152 (6.2%)	\$1258.69	\$1462 (7.6%)	+ 16.2
full-time, resident	\$792 (4.3%)	\$865.35	\$1162 (6.1%)	+ 34.3

* Calculations based on the US Department of Labor Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator

(http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)

** Percent change from the 2011 Predicted and 2011 Actual values.