

General information about the proposed amendments of the annual GSG fee

The current situation:

Currently, the annual GSG fee is a fixed amount (\$5) specified in our Constitution that can only be changed by a referendum passed by the Graduate Student Body.

Why are we trying to increase the fee?

This fee has been fixed at \$5 since it was instituted more than 15 years ago, while the spending power has gone down due to inflation and increased costs. We have two reasons for proposing a change to the GSG fee. The primary reason is that we are concerned that the progressive decline in the spending power of the GSG's budget will ultimately prevent the GSG from operating effectively. The other reason is that an increase in our fee would allow the GSG to expand its activities -- including advocacy, social events, co-sponsorship, and campus life.

~~We are proposing three constitutional amendments, which the Graduate Student Body can choose to adopt independently or in combination. First, we would like to increase the fee slightly each year at a rate that reflects annual inflation and rising costs. Second, we propose to amend the constitution to change the base fee to \$10 to catch up with increases in costs over the past years. If the fee had been increased annually at a rate of 3-5% per year since its inception, the fee would currently be between \$8-\$11. The third proposes to amend the process for future changes to the fee by bringing it in line with the process for other constitutional amendments, which requires notification of the Graduate Student Body of a pending vote in Assembly. (This paragraph is incorrect – modifications have been made to the amendments at the December 2005 Assembly meeting)~~

What will the extra money be used for?

The fee is the basis for the majority of the operating budget of the GSG, which currently amounts to approximately \$10,000 a year. The GSG has been involved in many projects aimed at improving the quality of graduate student life. We have made progress on a number of important issues, such as post-enrollment (new DCE status), shuttle service (inception and improvements), housing (reduction in rent of New Lawrence, improvements in the draw process), health care (reduced cost of dependant care), library services (Firestone renovations, secure storage), campus safety, etc.

- **Advocacy efforts**

Due to lack of funds, the GSG has a limited ability to send representatives to conferences that would help us compare our practices with those of our sister institutions. The GSG has been able to attend the Ivy Summit for the last few years, where we have learned about how other schools handle issues such as time to degree, housing, student life, health care, and dependent health care. This information has greatly helped us in making progress on these issues with the University. However, there have been other conferences -- such as the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation's National Conference on Graduate Student Leadership -- to which the GSG has been unable to send graduate representatives.

- Social events

If more funding were available, the diversity and quantity of events on campus for graduate students would increase.

Currently, the GSG is only able to provide a small amount of co-sponsorship to student organizations that request funding for their events. This money is rarely sufficient to run an entire event, so they must seek out additional funding from multiple sources on campus. This is time consuming and discouraging, especially for small groups or small events. By offering additional funds, the GSG can support more student life activities. Many student groups like ACSS, ASAP, GCF, QGC, the International festival, the Game, Swing Club, the Butler Committee and the GC House have had their events co-sponsored by the GSG.

For GSG-organized events, we currently seek co-sponsorship from other campus sources such as the APGA, Office of Graduate Student Life and the Vice President for Campus Life. This is necessary to successfully organize our large events. With an increased budget, the GSG could hold more major social events (like the Wine and Cheese, the Valentine's Day dance, and the Frolic at Frist), or organize multiple, smaller events (such as the upcoming talk by Jorge Cham, author of phdcomics.com).

The GSG could organize additional academic and professional development events like the career mixers between graduate students and alumni (one for the humanities was organized by the GSG Academic Affairs Committee in spring 2005). We've funded the Graduate Research Symposium in the past and could promote more such interdisciplinary events.

- Campus life

One of the goals of the GSG is to foster community building amongst alumni, postdocs, undergraduates, faculty, etc. We could organize events and programs for this purpose. We would also like to improve the quality of campus life by supporting pilot programs for projects like a shuttle to the Rt. 1 shopping centers.

Additional Motivations:

- Matching funds:

The Office of the Vice President for Campus Life has generously offered to match a portion of whatever we raise by this amendment. If the Graduate Student Body agrees to raise the fee, Vice President Dickerson will provide an additional \$3000-\$5000 per year to the GSG's budget from her office's budget.

- Our fee is far below the fees charged at our peer institutions. For example:

- Brown: \$30/yr
- Columbia: \$30/yr
- Cornell: \$62/yr
- Dartmouth: \$45/yr
- Harvard: \$20/yr
- UPenn: \$70/yr
- Princeton's USG fee \$60/yr (in addition to class dues of \$45 and residential college fees)