Resolution 17: A Resolution Regarding Graduate Funding and Tuition

WHEREAS, Graduate students require access to the resources of the university, such as libraries and advising, in order to complete their degrees; and

WHEREAS, Graduate students in the final years of their programs can face two particular difficulties, namely the difficulty of accessing these resources and the inconsistent handling of external awards; and

WHEREAS, Median time to degree in the humanities is 7.1 years, ranging from 5.9 years in Romance Studies to 8.1 years in East Asian Literature (Graduate School Annual Report 2010–11, p. 25); and

WHEREAS, The typical funding guarantee in the humanities programs is five years, consisting both of teaching assistantships and internal fellowships; and

WHEREAS, The gap between the funding provided from Cornell and the median time to degree is therefore 2.1 years; and

WHEREAS, Students in the final years of their degrees do not typically use the full “range of university human and capital resources” (Policy 3.13, page 9) that tuition offsets, including enrolling in classes because they are working on their dissertations; and

WHEREAS, Cornell Policy 3.13 Graduate Tuition and Other Support requires that full tuition is charged for all full-time students, except those maintaining “in absentia” status (Policy 3.13, page 9); and

WHEREAS, Full research doctorate tuition is $29,500 in the endowed colleges and $20,500 in the contract colleges; and

WHEREAS, Students may take a “leave of absence,” but this requires them to “relinquish access to campus facilities and services that normally accompany student status” (Code, Section V(D)(1)), including any resources requiring a netid (e.g., electronic journal access); and

WHEREAS, Students on a leave of absence must pay $200/semester to regain access to library facilities (Graduate School Form S3); and

WHEREAS, The revocation of student status while on a leave of absence forces the revocation of student visa status for international students, jeopardizing their ability to remain in the US; and
WHEREAS, Once their student visa status has been revoked, the only visa option available to
most international students is the F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), which requires
employment of at least 20-hours/week related to their major area of study and is limited to one
year for humanities students (“STEM” students are able to apply for a 17-month extension); and

WHEREAS, Students who are in absentia must provide proof that they live at least 100 miles
away from Ithaca, and therefore although they retain library privileges, making use of them is
impractical; and

WHEREAS, The Graduate School Code of Legislation (Section VI(H)(2)) already requires that
PhD students petition to stay in their programs beyond seven years, preventing students from
staying enrolled indefinitely; and

WHEREAS, Grants and fellowships sponsored by the federal government (e.g., by the National
Science Foundation (NSF) or the National Institutes of Health (NIH)) allow for the remission of
graduate tuition, as governed by OMB Circular A-21, Section J(45); and

WHEREAS, Cornell will cover any remaining tuition should an award from the federal
government, or ten other specifically enumerated agencies (e.g., the American Association of
University Women or the American Council of Learned Societies), not cover the full amount
(Policy 3.13, pp. 15-16); and

WHEREAS, This leaves many external awards that do not cover tuition, especially in the
humanities, for which the student must negotiate with their department for tuition remission; and

WHEREAS, International students are often not eligible for many external awards, because
many awards based in their home country will not fund study abroad, and many American
awards are only for American citizens; and

WHEREAS, The treatment of external awards across various departments is uneven: some
students can have their Cornell funding deferred for the duration of the external award (or a
subset thereof), with Cornell providing a tuition “top up” while others may simply lose their
Cornell funding for the duration of the external award; and

WHEREAS, This disparate treatment of external funding can take away the financial incentive
to seek external awards, as students find they create difficulties; and
WHEREAS, Six of the other Ivy League schools (Brown, Columbia, Harvard, Penn, Princeton and Yale) provide some form of reduced tuition after the fourth year of study (dollar figures as of Spring 2012):

- Brown: $2,583 (>= 4th year)
- Columbia: $3,392 (>= 5th year)
- Harvard: $2,402 (>= 5th year)
- Penn: $3,208 (>= 6th year)
- Princeton: $4,420 (>= 5th year)
- Yale: $390 (>= 5th year)

WHEREAS, A reduced tuition rate for the years after a graduate student has passed his/her A examination and is no longer taking classes would make it considerably more feasible for their departments, or the students themselves, to afford tuition; and

WHEREAS, creating a reduced tuition rate and new student status would allow for the time and resources to enable graduate students to complete higher quality dissertations, aiding department degree completion rate, improving success on the increasingly competitive academic job market, and thereby also improving the factors that go into department rankings conducted by bodies such as the National Research Council; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the GPSA calls on Cornell University to:

1. Implement a reduced tuition scheme for upper-year students without funding, or with unmatched external awards.
2. Create a new student status, or revise the existing “leave of absence” or “in absentia” statuses, to permit graduate students, especially international students, to remain in Ithaca beyond their funding guarantee.
3. Promulgate a clear and equitable policy for the coverage of tuition from external awards from agencies other than the federal government or the ten agencies specifically mentioned in Policy 3.13.
4. Strive to make Directors of Graduate Study and Graduate Field Assistants fully aware of Cornell’s graduate tuition policies, specifically as they relate to matching/top-ups and immigration status.
5. Consider ways to reduce the median time to degree, particularly in the humanities. (Median time to degree is 7.1 years in the humanities, 5.7 years in the life sciences, 5.6
years in the physical sciences and 6.2 years in the social sciences.) Possible ways might include:

(a) Credit for students entering a PhD program with a master’s degree;
(b) Innovative, collaborative dissertation projects;
(c) Shortened examination time frames (i.e., complete the exam earlier, and streamline the requirements);

RESOLVED, That this resolution be sent to David Skorton, President; Kent Fuchs, Provost; Barbara Knuth, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School; Jan Allen, Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs; Sheri Notaro, Associate Dean for Inclusion and Professional Development; Sarah Wicker, Associate Dean for Administration.

Respectfully submitted,

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