Resolution 15: Requesting a full, transparent, and ongoing accounting of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the funding of continuing graduate students

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic, through delays of in-person research, reduced availability of grants, and possible delays in students’ graduation, will put additional pressure on all existing sources of funding. Continuing graduate students facing funding challenges and uncertainty need the support and leadership of the Graduate School to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their academic futures. This resolution asks for a periodic report on the state of graduate student funding, a plan for relief if that funding is insufficient in aggregate, and a yearly report on the state of the cohort affected by this pandemic.

Sponsored by: David Kent, Tim Luttermoser, Morgan Eisenlord

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted graduate students in nearly all aspects of their academic and personal lives.

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to impact research and teaching and is expected to continue to affect these activities for months to come.

Whereas, students across the university are reporting concerns about delays in time to completion and uncertainty in funding.

Whereas, sources of external funding that have been relied on in the past, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program and NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants, have been significantly reduced in recent years both preceding and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

See, for example, the pre-print Johnson, R., Coleman, R., Batten, N., Hallsworth, D., Spencer, E. (2020). The Quiet Crisis of PhDs and COVID-19: Reaching the financial tipping point, addressing the impact of COVID-19 on PhDs in Australia. A quote: "It seems prudent to consider the current experience of doctoral students, and the long-term implications of allowing the current impacts to PhD students to go unchecked. If we do nothing, the potential disruption to research capacity may weaken our societal, public health, and economic recovery. Governments, universities, learned societies, and industry need to produce coherent strategies to address the PhD crisis before it diminishes our research capacity that will be so vital for a good COVID recovery."


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Whereas, many external grants, particularly those from non-profit organizations which are in many fields relied on for early career funding grants to support graduate student research and postdoctoral research shortly after graduation, were put on hold in 2020 and remain on hold at present,

Whereas, many students and faculty struggled to apply for grants and fellowships due to direct and indirect challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whereas, the contraction of external funding and delays in time to degree completion will put additional pressure on all sources of funding including teaching assistantships,

Whereas, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic outcomes of impacted graduate students will evolve over time,

Whereas, graduate students from vulnerable populations are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 related impacts, both academic and financial, and these impacts frequently overlap with social inequalities,

Whereas, the state of funding for graduate students is a collective problem in addition to an individual problem,

Be it therefore resolved, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) requests that the Graduate School collect a report on the current state of funding for graduate students across the university for the upcoming Summer 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2022 semesters, AND

That this report includes, at a minimum: data on extensions filed to the Graduate School for time to degree milestones (special committee formation, A exams, etc.) citing COVID-19 related delays for Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, estimates of funding available to graduate students in aggregate and projected funding needs for continuing students, taking into account an estimate of graduation delays, with figures broken down by college and demographic information, AND

That the Graduate School shares this information with the GPSA and with all field Directors of Graduate Study in June 2021 and June 2022.

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4 https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-the-research-enterprise/, section “Other Major Sources of Research Funding”
Be it further resolved, that if this report shows widespread concerns regarding funding stability, that the Graduate School, the University, and each College pursue every possible avenue for ensuring consistent funding for all graduate students impacted by the pandemic. Such measures may include, but by no means should be limited to: offering additional Lecturer positions targeted at unfunded graduate students; discussing novel solutions like the possibility of faculty trading a reduction in pay for a reduction in teaching load to fund additional assistanships or instructor of record positions; and the University working with regional educational institutions like State University of New York colleges, Tompkins Cortland Community College, Cayuga Community College, and other local institutions to determine if graduate students in need of funding may be able to help fill instructional gaps at those institutions;

Be it finally resolved, that the GPSA requests that the Graduate School continues to collect information on the time to degree and dropout rate of graduate students enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and share these reports with GPSA and field Directors of Graduate Studies in June of each year through the year 2027.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Kent, Student Advocacy Committee Chair and Field Representative

Tim Luttermoser, Voting Member,

Morgan Eisenlord, Field Representative