**R. 7-- Call for an engaged and transparent conversation with the larger body of graduate and professional students**

**WHEREAS**, the Cornell University administration has a tradition of engaging with select graduate and professional student leaders and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with different representative assemblies to work toward the common good of the campus community; and

**WHEREAS**, according to President David Skorton, the purpose of assemblies, including the GPSA is to "represent the concerns of their constituents in a process of consultation and deliberation that goes beyond the term of any university administration, working collectively to identify, communicate and resolve issues;" [[1]](#footnote-1) and

**WHEREAS**, the GPSA has historically had a collaborative, productive, and positive working relationship with the administration;[[2]](#footnote-2) and

**WHEREAS**, over the past several years, a number of important decisions have been made by the administration which significantly impact the well-being of graduate and professional students; and

**WHEREAS**, several of these decisions have highlighted the extent to which important decisions can be made despite the disapproval of graduate and professional student leaders, without public discussion, and sometimes without consultation of graduate and professional students.

* Although a limited number of graduate student leaders in the GPSA and the General Committee of the Graduate School were consulted on the changes to late stage tuition rate policy prior to its implementation, they were explicitly barred from sharing the information publicly;[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The Graduate Student Elected trustee and the representatives to the General Committee of the Graduate School were the only graduate students made aware of the proposed changes to TA/RA stipend rates prior to their approval by the Board of Trustees and they were, again, explicitly barred from sharing this information publicly. The change in stipend rates was approved by the Board of Trustees, with no public discussion or debate[[4]](#footnote-4), and despite the vocal disapproval of the single graduate student on the Board;[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Graduate students were not allowed to participate in the Worker's Compensation working group formed in response to the passage of R.9 in 2014, and changes to the Procedures for Graduate Student Injuries[[6]](#footnote-6) were implemented despite the documented dissatisfaction expressed by the members of GPSA Executive Board and Advocacy Committee. [[7]](#footnote-7)
* The call for prioritized divestment from the fossil fuels companies passed by the Student Assembly, the Faculty Senate and the GPSA,[[8]](#footnote-8) was ultimately rejected;
* Discussion of the new mandatory $350 fee for students not enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) was limited to select graduate and professional student leaders, who were, again, barred from seeking the opinions of their peers; and

**WHEREAS**, as delineated above, decisions made by the Board of Trustees, the Cornell Graduate School, or President Skorton can be implemented without an engaged, transparent discussion with the larger body of graduate and professional students; therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly is opposed to decision making by the Cornell University administration that precludes substantive discussion with the larger body of graduate and professional students, as we believe it violates the principles of shared governance within the University;

**RESOLVED**, that the GPSA recommends that the University consider a policy of public notice and an open public comment period whenever a policy is being considered that would change student support, benefits, tuition rates, or any other changes to academic policy that would constitute a substantive departure from current policy; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the GPSA proposes the following internal procedure to ensure an engaged and transparent discussion takes place:

* Before any new potential policies reflecting substantive changes to graduate or professional student financial support or benefits, tuition rates, academic policy, or any other policies which represent a diversion from established precedent are implemented, an executive session of the GPSA as defined by the GPSA Bylaws and Charter will be held,
* The Graduate School, or appropriate administrative unit, should notify the GPSA if there are any potential policy changes to be considered,
* Additionally, the GPSA Executive Board, Graduate Student Trustee, or any other student serving as a liaison to the committee charged with formulating the policy may recommend an executive session at their discretion to discuss proposed policy changes in the absence of advanced notification from the administration,
* The topic will be presented and discussed during this executive session,
* The executive session will be held in the week prior to a regularly scheduled meeting of the GPSA, with the agenda finalized one week before the executive session,
* Following the session, a formal memorandum recording both the majority opinion and the dissenting view of those consulted is signed by all the attendees of the session,
* The GPSA Executive Board, Graduate Student Elected Trustee, and any other students who may have been consulted over the issue will prepare the formal memorandum.
* The memorandum will be made available to the administration, as well as to the future Executive Board as a reference, and will be made public after the new policy is announced, and
* The discussion in the executive session will remain confidential;

**RESOLVED**, that, should such a discussion with a larger representation of graduate and professional students not be possible,

* The administration should provide, in writing, a reasonable explanation to the GPSA Executive Board, and
* Those students already consulted over the potential new policy through their appointments will prepare a formal memorandum in conjunction with the Executive Board, though this would not be considered the official opinion of the GPSA, and
* The provided explanation will be included with any memorandum when it is made public;

**RESOLVED**, that these executive session discussions should occur with enough time for the members of the Cornell University administration with authority over the implementation of the proposed policy change to consider the formal memorandum prior to making a final decision;

**RESOLVED**, that the proposed discussion procedure will allow a more engaged and transparent discussion with the larger body of graduate and professional students; and

**RESOLVED**, that the GPSA looks forward to working with President David Skorton, President-elect Elizabeth Garrett, and Dean of the Graduate School Barbara Knuth on the details of the procedure to ensure that transparent and substantive conversations with the campus community remain a foundational principle of the governance of Cornell University in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

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Humanities Voting Member

1. http://cornellsun.com/blog/2014/11/24/skorton-the-role-of-shared-governance-in-changing-times/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.cornellgpsa.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/GPCI2013.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. GPSA Resolution 6 AY 2014-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://assembly.cornell.edu/uploads/GPSA/20141117R4.doc [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://cornellsun.com/blog/2014/03/24/guest-room-research-assistants-your-work-matters-just-less/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/policies/procedures-graduate-student-injuries [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.cornellgpsa.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Email-in-response-to-Working-Group-5-27-15.docx [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://assembly.cornell.edu/GPSA/2014SpringAction2 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)