March 31, 2011

President Peterson,

On behalf of the Graduate Student Government Association, the executive board respectfully submits the 2011 Graduate White Paper for your consideration. Within this document, you will find an outline of four distinct issues that are most pressing to the graduate body. As a supplement to the text provided, the appendix contains data related to the issues presented. We hope this document will initiate dialogue between the administration and Graduate SGA that together can make an even more fulfilling graduate experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Baldridge
Graduate President

Kathy Schnure
Graduate Vice President

Lauren Polander
Grad VP - Academic Affairs

Brandon Polander
Grad VP - Health Services

Sean Dunn
Grad VP - Student Welfare

Arren Washington
Grad VP - Conference Fund

James Black
Secretary

Mihir Pathak
Coordinating Officer

Michael Ellis
Grad VP - Internal Affairs

Evan McClain
Treasurer

Jason Okerman
Grad VP - Communications
Top Concerns of the Graduate Community

Within the graduate community there are a number of campus issues that graduates face on a daily basis. While this document does not attempt to capture all of them, below are highlighted the top four issues that we as Graduate SGA wish to address.

1. Fees
   - Academic Excellence Fee
   - Comparison of total fees levied to peer institutions
   - Effect on graduate recruitment
   - Overall financial burden to current graduate population

2. Health Insurance
   - Fringe benefits
   - Timeline for acquisition of a new health insurance plan
   - Formal statement of exclusion from Board of Regents
   - Hiring of health insurance advisor

3. Professional Development
   - GTRIC
   - Graduate Career Symposium
   - Graduate Certificate Program

4. Improving the graduate community
   - Communication across departments and the campus
   - Creation of a more robust and comprehensive campus calendar
   - Programming/events geared toward graduate students
   - Providing support and infrastructure to foster a greater community

The following sections detail these top concerns, providing additional background information as well as offering suggestions to address the issues.
**Issue: Fees**

**Background:**

Fees continue to be a significant issue among the graduate population. To address this issue, the Graduate Student Senate passed a resolution coupled with a letter from the Graduate Executive Board on February 16 to express our growing concern of the financial burden fees have on the graduate body. These concerns include:

- Transparency of and lack of accountability for the Academic Excellence Fee.
- Georgia Tech’s rank amongst its peer institutions for total cost of fees.
- The concern that high fees deter students from applying to and attending Georgia Tech.
- Thorough review of any new fee requests.

As an appendix to this white paper, we have included research showing the greater than 100% increase in fees over the past ten years. Additionally, a comparison of mandatory fees is provided, showing that Tech has higher fees than 15 of our 20 peer institutions. Also to supplement this white paper, we have included both the Executive Letter and the Senate resolution highlighting Graduate SGA’s concerns over fees and health insurance (a related issue that is discussed in the next section).

**Suggestions to address issue:**

We understand the necessity of fees and the valuable campus services they provide. The Senate resolution, the Executive letter, and this white paper are not meant to challenge the idea of fees in general but rather to show that fees at current levels are adversely affecting the graduate student body. With this in mind, we propose the following suggestions to counteract and address those negative effects:

- For the administration to provide transparency for the spending of the Excellence fee.
- Use the Excellence fee to provide services to students by supplementing other fees.
- Look for ways to diminish the need for continuous increases in fees.
- Consider the inclusion of the Excellence fee and possibly other fees into tuition.
- Research the impact that fees have on graduate recruitment, especially among students who choose another institution, peer or not, over Tech.
Issue: Health Insurance

Background:

Student health insurance has been a persistent issue for many years. After the requirement set by the Board of Regents for all student insurance to follow the mandatory plan set forth by the Board, Tech students have suffered from an erosion of benefits coupled with increased premiums. Additional concerns and knowledge surrounding the collective insurance as well as issues concerning Tech graduate student mandatory insurance include:

- Recently, the Board has allowed institutions to adopt insurance plans for their respective institutions independently from the collective group of 35 USG institutions.
- Georgia Tech is unique compared to other institutions in that we collect a health fee from our entire student body that sustains a robust student health center that keeps our claims history relatively low, reducing the loss ratio for our insurance provider.
- In contrast, some institutions bill the student insurance to fund their respective health centers or refer ill students to nearby healthcare facilities, thus continuing to inflate the premium of the collective insurance.
- Confusion and mistrust surrounds the student insurance in terms of the claims process and knowledge of benefits/services.
- Fringe benefits are currently at much lower levels compared to many of our peer institutions, underscoring the burden to graduate students of health-related fees.

Suggestions to address issue:

- Work toward an overall plan that lowers the student’s cost and/or increases benefits for students.
- Increase the fringe benefit to levels matching our peer institutions and develop a timeline for this implementation.
- Uphold the timeline provided in the appendix concerning the acquisition of a new insurance plan for GT students.
- Provide support to the SHAC (Student Health Advisory Council) committee charged with acquiring new insurance by:
  - Writing a formal statement about GT’s intention to break from the BOR
  - Providing administrative support to the committee
- Establish a dedicated representative within Health Services to provide support to and educate students with health insurance needs.
Issue: Professional Development

Background:

At Georgia Tech, a number of departments offer some limited opportunities to enhance professional development, but a central professional development plan, program, etc. is lacking on campus. With the increasing demands of employers coupled with a tough job market, we must ensure our students have the documented, necessary skills outside of their primary studies to succeed in the world today. Professional development for the entire graduate campus falls heavily upon Grad SGA and we have answered many issues by:

- Hosting and planning the Georgia Tech Research and Innovation Conference (GTRIC) to provide graduates an opportunity to showcase their research in a conference environment.
- Hosting and planning (in collaboration with CETL and Career Services) the Graduate Career Symposium that provides students with valuable knowledge concerning career planning in academia, government, and industry.
- Fostering the creation of a Graduate Communication Certificate program in collaboration with Dr. Karen Head – Director of Graduate Communications in CETL.
- Providing monetary assistance through the Graduate Conference Fund to graduates wishing to travel to conferences.

This highlights some of the major events and initiatives within Grad SGA to address overall professional development of the graduate body. With this, it is important to note that more opportunities can and should be extended to the graduate body to make graduates competitive against other students—especially those of our peer institutions.

Suggestions to address issue:

- Continued administrative support and financial support for our programming.
- Possible expansions of support, especially for programs that currently receive no funding.
- Expansion of programming that applies to the entire graduate body.
- Encouragement of departments to offer programming or reinstate programming that may be lost due to continuing budget cuts.
**Issue: Improving the Graduate Community**

**Background:**

Currently at Georgia Tech, the graduate student body is fragmented across campus and often lacks mechanisms to bring graduates together. This problem extends well beyond the capabilities of Grad SGA to address. While in the past many departments provided various means to bring their graduates together and foster development, we are finding that these opportunities have decreased or are completely abandoned. With this, a number of issues surrounding the collective nature of the graduate community in general include:

- Communication to the graduate body on overarching issues is lacking.
- Many departments do not encourage graduates to expand beyond their outlined academic requirements.
- Departments across campus have eliminated funding for their respective graduate student organizations, impairing their ability to provide valuable programming to promote area-specific development.
- Many graduate students lack a strong connection to Tech due to a lack of cohesive, campus-wide programming that could foster a stronger collective graduate community and collective university community.

**Suggestions to address issue:**

- Creation of a campus calendar that includes all programming and events in an easily filtered interface to increase the effectiveness of existing programming.
- Possible creation and funding of an event similar to the Graduate Student Picnic to be held in the Spring semester to bring graduate students together.
- Encourage Deans and Department Heads to provide or reinstate support within their respective departments that is used to provide programming to grad students.
- Continued support for endeavors that the administration and Grad SGA currently partner to offer.
Appendix

A. GSS Resolution on Fees

Graduate Student Senate of the Georgia Institute of Technology

WHEREAS the total monetary amount of mandatory student fees has increased by 150% over the past 10 years, presenting a substantial financial burden upon every graduate student attending Georgia Tech.

WHEREAS mandatory student fees can be considered to go beyond the traditional five fees of health, athletics, student activity, transportation, and technology and should be defined to include parking fees, the Academic Excellence Fee and mandatory student insurance enrollment.

WHEREAS the Georgia Institute of Technology currently ranks sixth among its peer institutions in terms of total semester cost of mandatory student fees that only includes the 5 mandatory student fees plus the Academic Excellence Fee.

WHEREAS the total yearly costs of the before mentioned fees amounts to approximately 2.5 months of the average yearly graduate stipend.

WHEREAS concern is explicitly raised over the Academic Excellence Fee due to a lack of transparent purpose and student input and the inability to discuss its imposition upon the graduate student body.

WHEREAS higher than average fees may adversely affect graduate recruitment and retention.

WHEREAS the Graduate Student Government Association understands the necessity of some fees to sustain vital campus services for the benefit of all members of the Georgia Tech Community.

BE IT RESOLVED by the Graduate Student Government of the Georgia Institute of Technology expresses its strongest concern over mandatory student fees spanning all categories mentioned here within and urges the administration to review the fee structure and its effects on current and prospective graduate population.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if adopted, the Secretary of the Senate of the Student Government Association shall deliver this signed resolution to the President, Provost, and Senior Vice Provost of the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents.

Adopted in the Graduate Senate on February 15, 2011.
B. Executive Letter on Fees

The Executive Board of the Graduate Student Government Association

The Executive Board of the Graduate Student Government Association of Georgia Tech wishes to express, in complement with the resolution adopted by the Graduate Senate, its most sincere concern over the continuing escalation and current monetary levels of mandatory students fees levied on the graduate student body. Fees, as a single topic, represent one of the most significant issues that affect the entire graduate population.

Please note this letter is not intended to attack the concept of fees, which we understand are a necessary component to campus entities, particularly higher education institutions. Rather, our major concern resides in the fact that Georgia Tech has higher fees than 15 of our 20 peer institutions. Yearly graduate student stipends average a pre-tax total of $20,000. In contrast, the total sum of fees, including the five mandatory fees, academic excellence fee, parking fees and enrollment in the mandatory health insurance, amounts to a yearly total of $4100. This means that approximately 21.5% of an average graduate’s total income goes solely to pay fees. This high number serves as a burden to current students and as a likely deterrent of prospective students. Since it has always been the goal of Georgia Tech to recruit the best students, we believe it is highly likely that current fee levels may adversely affect graduate recruitment and retention.

To address this issue, we respectfully propose action items that we feel are important to consider:

- Transparency of, and accountability for, the spending of the Academic Excellence Fee.
- Increase fringe benefits for graduate students which currently offer $100 in the fall and spring semesters.
- Increase negotiations that encourage Georgia Tech to break away from the Board of Regents student insurance system, which, as preliminary research shows, would likely result in the lowering of health insurance premiums.
- Encourage the Office of Graduate Studies and Admissions to survey prospective students who decline acceptance into respective graduate programs to determine if fees are becoming or have become a deterrent for attending Georgia Tech.
- Slow the charge of Institute overhead to campus entities that rely on fees as a primary source of income, which represent a total of $6 per semester in fees for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.
- Address the possibility of the inclusion of the Academic Excellence Fee into tuition.

The primary purpose of this letter, and the Senate resolution, is to formally address the issue of fees and create an open dialogue between the students and the administration concerning only the most pressing fee-related issues. As the undersigned, it is our hope that in the spirit of Georgia Tech, we can all work together to resolve these issues, thus continuing to make Georgia Tech the world class institution that it is.
C. Research into Fees at Tech and at Peer Institutions

**Total Mandatory Student Fees**

![Graph showing Total Mandatory Student Fees from 2002 to 2012.](image)

**Fees for Peer Institutions**

![Bar chart showing fees for various peer institutions.](image)
C. Student Health Insurance Timeline

Below is a timeline / outline for the procurement of a new student health insurance provider.

- A request for proposal (RFP) will be written solely for the Georgia Institute of Technology and not in cooperation with the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia as in the past.
- Rosalind Meyers, Vice President for Campus Services, Dr. Carole Moore (Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs) Dr. Gregory Moore (Senior Director of Stamps Health Services) Anthony Baldridge (Graduate Student Body President), and Brandon Polander (Grad SGA VP of Health Services) have created and approved the below timeline.

April 5, 2011 - Student Health Advisory Committee meeting
- At this meeting the current Pearce and Pearce (P&P) benefits plan ending July 2012 will be voted on by SHAC. This will mark the final year of the P&P contract secured in 2006.
- Members of the SHAC sub-committee on student health insurance will also be nominated.

June 1, 2011
The SHAC sub-committee on student health insurance will begin discussing the contents of the RFP.

July 1, 2011
Dr. Gregory Moore (or someone from the Stamps Health Center) will begin drafting the request for proposal according to the guidelines discussed by the SHAC student insurance sub-committee. GT Procurement will be present and involved to advise.

October 1, 2011
The completed RFP will be submitted to GT Procurement for review.

January 31, 2012
- Deadline for receipt of proposals from prospective student insurance providers.
- After this date the SHAC sub-committee will review the proposals and invite promising vendors to GT campus for presentation of proposals.

March 2012
- Selection of student insurance vendor.
- Brochures and informational material will be printed and distributed.

July 2012
The new student insurance provider will begin providing service to Georgia Tech students.

Disclaimer: This proposal has not been reviewed by SHAC and is subject to change pending its presentation at the April 5, 2011 SHAC meeting as well pending discussion with the GT Office of Procurement.