Senate Budget Committee Meeting Minutes

November 17th 2016

Dr. Unil Perera called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

Minutes from October 20th meeting. Motion to approve. Second. Minutes were approved with the addition of Dr. Chris Goode to the list of attendees.

Dr. Lisa Armistead, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Associate Provost for Graduate Programs, reported on graduate student stipends, enrollment, and other graduate matters. The report focused on base stipend levels, comparison of stipends across colleges and degrees. It’s been primarily an internal picture of student stipends, which did not show a comparison to national data.

RBC and COE have grown their graduate enrollment, and that helped the University to increase the percentage of graduate students enrolled. As of October 31, the total number of graduate assistants was 2,902 (41%). They received the total monthly funding in the amount of $3,395,239. The average monthly funding was $1,170 per student; it ranged from $100 to $4,950. Funding for PhD students was higher than funding for MS students ($2,233,480 and $1,064,253, respectively).

The Provost Office is in the process of revising our graduate assistance policies. Currently, the monthly stipend is capped at $3,000. Special authorization is required for any exceptions to be made in any particular case. It has been suggested to have a discussion towards the end of the meeting to see if the cap should be removed or increased.

The main sources of internal funding are 2CI scholarships, area of focus scholarships (MBD, B&B), Provost’s Dissertation fellowships, internal research and instructional funds, as well as support provided by administrative offices. Most of internal funding comes from instructional support (27%). The University will look at credit hour generation per $1 of instructional funds to better distribute instructional funds between different units. GTAs’ teaching load vs. their progress towards graduation will also be considered.

External funding primarily comes from faculty grants (direct and indirect costs), premium tuition, and student fellowships.

A&S is a large College; it accumulates $2,040,666 in graduate assistants’ funding (more than all other colleges combined). Within the College of Arts and Sciences, the area of Natural and Computational Sciences is best funded ($1,060,285). This is also the group that is best positioned to take advantage of external funding ($265,130).

New sources of support include Second Century Initiative (115 Fellows at $22,000 = $2,530,000 annually), Provost’s Dissertation Fellowships (17 Current Fellows at $2,000/month will expend to 25 Fellows = $600,000 annually), and Library Dissertation Travel Awards. Most students receiving Provost’s Dissertation Fellowships complete their dissertations before their funding expires. There is huge amount of accountability for the recipients: if they do not meet their goals for two consecutive months, they lose funding (no one has lost the funding yet, which can be attributed to a rigorous selection process). There is also accountability to each other among Provost’s Dissertation Fellowships’ recipients. 2CI scholarship recipients are not allowed to teach during their first year; they can teach one class at most during each consecutive year. 13 new PhD students will come to the Institute of Biosciences. The Institute has got its PhD program approved, and all PhD students will be supported with external funds.
Discussion on the $3000 cap on monthly graduate stipends. This cap was established 10 years ago. Some attendees expressed the opinion that for external funds, the University has to let PIs decide on how they support their graduate research assistants. We need to attract the very best talent to compete for external awards. In engineering programs, salaries for graduates with BS degrees are very high. To recruit the best graduate students, we must offer competitive stipends. An important question that needs to be answered: are students that are getting the highest stipends really the best? Sometimes, PhD students making a lot of money do not want to graduate. The duration of their support has to be limited. At the end of the discussion, most committee members felt that the cap needs to be removed or increased.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm. Minutes prepared by Alexandra Smirnova.

Next Budget Committee meeting: December 8th (if there is some urgent agenda item) or January 19th.

Attendees: Sara Thomas Rosen, Jeff Steely, Deborah Baro, Vincent Rehder, Lawrence Kiage, Alexandra Smirnova, Unil Perera (Chair), Joann Lee-Joyner, Tony Lemieux, Teresa Ward, Jowanna C Tillman, Chris Goode, Xiaochun He, Andrew John Butler, James Weyhenmeyer, Lisa Armistead, Ramesh Vakamudi, Ciara Glover. Three committee members, Claudette Tolson, Kari Miller, and Joanna Wilson, participated electronically.