

Advocacy

- 1. GAPSA Advocacy Successfully Affects Stipend Levels:** The Research Council is pleased to report that the Penn Minimum Stipend level for fully funded Ph.D. students has been raised from \$18,000 to \$19,200. The Office of the President and the Office of the Provost reported this on February 14, 2008. This will be the minimum for the 2008-2009 academic year and that many programs at Penn will choose to fund students at higher levels. For example, the SAS minimum level (currently \$18,300 over nine months) will be increased beyond the new Penn minimum to \$21,000 over a ten-month period. The Graduate Division of SAS also reported this on February 14, 2008.
- 2. Changes to Ph.D. Tuition:** The Research Council invited Associate Provost Andrew Binns to attend one of the RC standing meetings in February. At this meeting the Associate Provost detailed the proposed changes to tuition for full-time Ph.D. students, and RC members were able to ask questions and give feedback to the Associate Provost. In general, the RC was supportive of the change, which would standardize tuition levels across the University, be revenue neutral overall, decrease tuition for many students, simplify the current tuition structure, and remove a significant financial barrier to interdisciplinary coursework. Several concerns were noted and expressed. The proceedings can be found in the RC minutes as well as in the RC report on the Proposed Changes to Ph.D. Tuition.
- 3. Changes to the Rules Governing the Ph.D.:** The Research Council recommended, to the Graduate Council of the Faculties, several changes to the rules governing Ph.D. programs. The majority of these have to do with student dissertation oversight by faculty members and limiting time-to-degree. The recommendations made were as follows:
 - Faculty will be required to evaluate preliminary exams and dissertation proposals promptly, within one month of the exam or proposal presentation.
 - Upon advancement to degree candidacy, each student will be provided with a Dissertation Committee consisting of at least three faculty members.
 - The Dissertation Committee will be required to meet with the student regularly to review his or her progress and provide feedback concerning the student's research.
 - The University's maximum time limit for completion of a Ph.D. program will be ten years after matriculation.
 - GAPSA also recommended the extension of the University-wide maternity leave policy for Ph.D. students from six to eight weeks (to reflect the recent NIH policy changes) and that it also be extended to fathers and cases of adoption.

Budget

The Research Council approved a 2007-2008 Research Council budget as follows. The information in the table below includes the amount of the budget that was allocated and the amount spent as of 04/30/08. Please note that summer travel grant reimbursement has not yet been accounted for since it has yet to be spent.

	Budgeted	Allocated	Spent
Research Council	\$45,000	\$46,851.26	\$36,694.89
<i>Academic Event Grants</i>	\$10,000	\$8,790.00	\$8,790.00
<i>Navigating Series</i>	\$15,000	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
<i>Research Student Conference Travel Grants</i>	\$20,000	\$23,061.26	\$12,904.89
Office of the Provost Funds	\$20,000	\$20,000.00	\$12,904.89
<i>Research Student Conference Travel Grants</i>	\$20,000	\$20,000.00	\$12,904.89
Research Council Surplus	\$24,467	\$10,000.00	\$0.00
<i>Research Student Conference Travel Grants</i>	\$10,000	\$10,000.00	\$0.00
<i>Available Surplus</i>	\$14,467	\$0.00	\$0.00

Student Travel Grants

In 2008-2009, the Research Council awarded 72 Fall, 122 Spring, 64 Summer Conference Travel Grants to 258 research students representing each of the nine research graduate schools within the University. The grant awards did not exceed \$300 per individual but when combined totaled \$53,061.62. This includes a \$250 per student cap imposed on Spring grants to accommodate more student recipients. An unintended consequence of the spring \$250 per student cap was that quite a few recipients opted not to seek reimbursement at all.

Academic Event Grants

In the Spring 2008 semester, the Research Council awarded six student groups academic event funds totaling \$5,540.00. These groups are listed here. These amounts are comparable to previous awards and the demand was about what we had expected. We came in slightly under budget this year with 1,210.00 remaining in event funds.

Group	Applicant	Award
Germanic Languages and Literatures	Matthew Hendelman	\$300
Linguistics Club	Catherine Lai	\$1,500
South Asia Studies	Steven Vose	\$1,500
Biomedical Graduate Studies	Soren Haward	\$500
Graduate School of Education	David Soo	\$450
Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics	Joe Laakso	\$1,200

Future work

The 2007-2008 Research Council makes the following recommendations for addenda items for next year's council.

1. Review of the Ph.D. Exit Survey

The University conducts an exit survey of all Ph.D. degree recipients. We are currently pressuring the University to compile and examine the data collected by this survey over the past ten years. As the University is now looking at this survey, we have an opportune time to look at it ourselves and to recommend improvements, if needed (see www.upenn.edu/grad/sdso/sdso.html).

2. Lack of funding for advanced Ph.D. students

While some Ph.D. students are offered a full funding package of five years, others receive only three and still others have noted a more vague promise of funding. Last year, students in at least four schools -- SAS, SP2, Education, and Design -- reported to GSAC about challenges securing funding for the duration of their time at Penn. For example, over the last two years, SAS has been reported to phase out the SAS Fellowships that used to get senior people through their dissertations. CGS, an important employer for doctoral students on campus, reportedly changed the pay scale for courses to "lecturer B," so that the level of pay has dropped to about \$4,000 a semester for solo-teaching a course, with health insurance not included.

3. Students with dependents

Unlike faculty and staff, Penn students with dependents are not offered the reduced "assisted rate" available at Penn's daycare center. A further fee-assistance program is made available only to University employees. Of special concern is the situation of international students with dependents, as their spouses typically do not have employment permits in the U.S., and their children are not eligible for either state or national healthcare programs for the poor. Such students must therefore finance their families exclusively by means of their fellowships and by the salary they may get when working as Penn employees. Even students who are U.S. citizens cannot always rely on their partner's income and financial security.

4. Grievance Procedures

There is no uniform grievance procedure in place for graduate students who feel they have been mistreated. Often, the policy is for department chairs to handle these issues, even if the department chair is the accused party. Conflicts of interest like this should not exist.