

Final Report of the Ohio University Graduate Student Senate on the 5 Year Academic Action Plan

“Pandemonium did not reign, it poured” – John Hendrick Bangs

The fall quarter agenda of the Ohio University Graduate Student Senate has been dominated by discussions, resolutions, and advocacy focused on the Five Year Academic Action Plan. Our efforts to address the plan began with an item for discussion at our third meeting of the quarter. During the two weeks following that initial discussion, members of the GSS attended the open forums to ask questions regarding the origin of the funding priorities in the 5YAAP. We were directed to the various documents related to Vision OHIO. After investigation, it appeared that there was not a clear linkage between the 5YAAP and Vision Ohio, specifically the Graduate Priorities Implementation Report. This caused many GSS members to draft a resolution requesting that the funding allocated in the 5YAAP be increased and prioritized in line with the Graduate Priorities Implementation Report (GPIR). Once the resolution was passed, the Graduate Senate initiated a Call/Email-in campaign in support of our proposals. On our last meeting of the quarter, November 5, we invited the major stakeholders to further discuss the 5YAAP with graduate students. What follows is a summary of the feedback we received during all of our discussions, some of which refers to the entire 5YAAP, and some of which refers specifically to the graduate sections of the plan.

Concerns over Entire Plan

I. Concerns over the source of funds

- The most common concern related to the entire 5YAAP is related to the ambiguity regarding the source of funds to support the plan. While the plan specifies the amount of base reallocations required to fund each of its initiatives, the fact that there is no indication of where the realignments will come from causes much concern and anxiety. Given the cost of the initiatives, roughly Thirty-seven million dollars, this should come as little surprise given the amount of reallocations and realignments made in the past year as well as the cuts to the various academic departments during a time of fiscal uncertainty.

II. Concerns over the process of drafting the plan

- Given the importance of the 5YAAP to the future of Ohio University, it is extremely troubling how confused and disjointed the process has been to this point. The short timeline has been a concern that has been raised at multiple points during the process. To put it simply, the Board of Trustees set a timetable for approval of this document that seemingly all major constituencies feel is artificially accelerated, including our own administration. The most troubling aspect of this, and a concern that was raised at the November 5 GSS meeting, is that no one has seemed willing to take the initiative and tell the Board that a longer timeline would produce a better plan. One graduate student in attendance at the November 5 meeting expressed his difficulties in even getting other graduate students to invest in the public debate surrounding the plan. He attributes this to the impression left with many of the

graduate students who attended the open forum on Nov. 1. Many were so disillusioned by having their questions go unanswered (mainly because any individual who could answer their questions was not in attendance) that they saw little reason to spend more time trying to voice their opinion. This should cause concern for all involved in drafting this plan. To say that this process has been chaotic would be an understatement. The fact that many of the hard decisions regarding this plan will once again be made over a break magnifies all of the problems listed above.

Issues Related to Graduate Priorities

I. Enhance Graduate and Professional Education and Research

- On October 22, 2007, the Graduate Student Senate passed resolution 0708-05 (Attached to the end of this report) that called for returning the priorities of the 5YAAP to be more in line with the GPIR. Among the priorities requested in the resolutions are:
 1. A decrease in the general fee
 2. An enhancement to stipends
 3. A 75% subsidization of health insurance
 4. An increase in the number of assistantships, as well as the size and amount of named fellowships
 5. An increase to the GSS grant fund

All of these initiatives were outlined in the GPIR and did not appear in the 5YAAP. This produced concern, as it appeared that, quite possibly, Ohio University was backing out of some of its commitments to graduate students. Members of both GSS and the greater graduate student community were concerned about the proportionality of funding going towards enhancing graduate education and research. Only roughly \$390,000 is allocated to this section, which represents roughly 3% of the total realignment. To be fair, it has been made clear by members of the administration that proportionality was not the driving force behind the creation of the 5YAAP, however, whether the low proportion going towards graduate education was intentional or not is immaterial. The simple fact that the proportion is only 3% creates a perception among graduate students that graduate education is not as highly valued as other initiatives in the 5YAAP.

- After passage of the resolution, the GSS initiated a Call/Email-in campaign to the offices of Deans McWeeny and Ogles, as well as Provost Kathy Krendl. The large turnout of graduate students during this event was indicative of the support for aligning our priorities with those enumerated above as they relate to graduate student funding and compensation.
- There is also concern over the vagueness of the outcomes regarding section II of the 5YAAP. Given the small amount of funding already going to section II, vagueness over where it will be allocated causes much anxiety.
- Through our deliberations at our Nov. 5 meeting, it became apparent that the Ohio University administration would like for GSS to come up with a prioritized list for

the proposals enumerated in our resolution. Though it is still early to provide a comprehensive and final list, there are some guidelines to consider based on feedback we have received:

- a. There is a lot of concern related to the “hidden costs” of pursuing graduate education at Ohio University. Our high general fee, as well as health insurance costs (particularly for international students who are required to enroll in the Ohio University insurance plan) is a significant disincentive to recruiting top level graduate students. There were some anecdotes presented about prospective graduate students not entering a program once the amount of fees they would have to pay became apparent because they could get better offers from other schools.
- b. There was also concern regarding increasing graduate enrollment without significantly increasing the amount of fully-funded assistantships available for graduate students. There was a sense that increasing our graduate student selectivity and profile would be much easier if we could offer more opportunities for funding for graduate students.
- c. When it comes to providing sections of the academic plan that graduate students feel could be removed in favor of our proposals, the discussions are still ongoing, but some trends have emerged:
 1. There was a sense that the Athletic section of the plan was not warranted at this time. This is probably the biggest concern outside of the Graduate Education section of the plan that I have seen. The sense is that in terms of priority, promoting graduate education is more important than trying to enhance athletics.
 2. There are sections under the Enriching Environment section (particularly those that relate to Student Affairs) that cause concern. It has been mentioned that the sections of the plan related to enriching our environment tend to focus on undergraduate concerns only (dealing with alcohol, etc.) and have little bearing on the lives of graduate students. Furthermore, though initiatives like increasing the LeaderShape program could have benefit, the tight fiscal environment requires us to prioritize and graduate education should be a higher priority than some of these initiatives. The fact that Student Affairs has not placed information on the Academic Plan website to explain its section of the plan was also addressed.

All of these issues were addressed in the open forums related to the 5YAAP, as well as in our meetings and during discussions of our resolution. One can only hope that the Board of Trustees realizes how many questions remain about the Academic Plan and allow more input to be received before the final plan is implemented.

**A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE GRADUATE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
PRIORITIES OF VISION OHIO**

1. *Whereas:* Ohio University has dedicated itself to becoming a premier graduate and research institution and
2. *Whereas,* this desire has been clearly stated and developed in Vision Ohio; Ohio University's strategic plan and
3. *Whereas;* the Ohio University Graduate Student Senate has, and continues to, support the graduate goals outlined in Vision Ohio and
- 4 *Whereas;* Ohio University is currently developing a Five Year Academic Action Plan and,
- 5 *Whereas;* the Five Year Academic Action Plan stems from the goals and directives highlighted in Vision Ohio and,
- 6 *Whereas;* during the 2005-2006 academic year The Graduate Priorities Implementation Team issued a report detailing the priority initiatives for graduate education and research and,
- 7 *Whereas;* the Graduate Priorities Implementation Report included a list of the following initiatives:
 1. A reduction in the graduate student general fee.
 2. That the average level of stipends for Ohio University graduate students be increased.
 3. That the number of named fellowships for Ohio University graduate students be increased from a total of five to a total of ten, and that their value increase from \$13,000 to \$20,000.
 4. Increase the total number of Graduate Assistantships by fifty (50) over five years.
 5. That health insurance costs for Ohio University Assistants be subsidized by twenty-five percent and that such subsidization increase incrementally to seventy-five percent over three years (a 25% subsidy in year one, 50% in year two, with a 75% subsidy by year three).
 6. That the Graduate Student Senate Travel and Original Work Grant Fund be increased to \$150,000 annually.
- 8 *Whereas;* the Graduate Priorities Implementation Report directed that each of the previous initiatives commence during the 2007-2008 academic year and,
- 9 *Whereas;* as of October 2007 implementation of these initiatives has not begun and,
- 10 *Whereas;* none of the aforementioned initiatives are explicitly stated in the Ohio University Five Year Academic Action Plan therefore be it,
- 11 *Resolved* that goal number two in the Five Year Academic Action Plan be amended through the addition of the following outcomes:
 1. That the Graduate Student general fee be reduced through a buy-down of the general fee in the amount of \$900,000 over the next 3 years, with a \$300,000 annual reallocation in each of those years.
 2. Increase funding for stipends by \$1.2 million over the next 5 years in addition to the standard raise pool, with a reallocation of \$240,000 in each of the next five fiscal years.
 3. Increase the number of graduate assistantships by a total of 50 over five years, adding 10 assistantships (at \$25,000 per position) in FYs 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, with a total reallocation of \$1.25 million or \$250,000 per year.
 4. Incrementally increase the number of named fellowships from 5 to 10 and increase their amount from \$13,000 to \$20,000 annually, with the addition of one (1) fellowship and \$1,400 in FYs 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013.
 5. Begin subsidizing graduate assistant health insurance by 25% in FY 2008-2009, 50% in FY 2009-2010, with a 75% subsidy in FYs 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013, with a total reallocation of \$726,000 over the next five fiscal years.

6. Increase the GSS grant fund to \$150,000 annually, with the current funding of \$50,000 per year raised by a \$20,000 reallocation in each of the next five fiscal years.

Further be it,

12. *Resolved:* That the total cost for such initiatives be based on the monetary amounts enumerated in the Graduate Priorities implementation team report, at a total of \$4,294,000 over 5 years. Further be it,

13. *Resolved:* That a copy of this resolution and a letter of explanation be sent to, but not limited to: Dr. Roderick McDavis; President of Ohio University, The Board of Trustees, All drafters of the Five Year Academic Action Plan, All members of the Five Year Academic Action Plan Task Force.

Sponsors:

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