Resolution # 69-06

The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University

of the 69th Assembly
December 4, 2019

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Call to Change UPAC Funding Restrictions
Encouragement to the University Park Allocations Committee (UPAC) to make their policies more accessible to graduate students
(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

Nature of the Situation:

Section 3.3.1. of the University Park Allocations Committee (UPAC) Handbook currently reads

“A student traveling for the purpose of presenting their personal research is not eligible for UPAC funding for the date(s) that they are presenting their own research, as the travel experience would result in personal gain that is essential for academic progress. Ineligibility only applies to the student(s) involved with presenting their own research and may not affect other students attending.”

GPSA considers that this restriction places a significant burden on graduate students. Oftentimes, graduate students are not allowed to attend conferences by their advisor if they are not presenting their work. Furthermore, this requirement has been used to completely deny students their request for funding to conferences where they were presenting their work. For example, UPAC has denied funding to students with the justification “This decision was made due to the requestor stating that [they] would not be going to this conference if [they] could not present [their] research, as stated in the general meeting minutes.”
Many graduate students are simply not allowed by advisors or their assistantship managers to attend conferences if they are not presenting. Therefore, this restriction lowers the access to UPAC funding for graduate students for much more than just the day that they are presenting. Additionally, many of the experiences funded by UPAC ultimately result in personal gain, as experience added to the student’s educational process. The fact that presenting research is singled out in this way is not consistent with other requests funded.

UPAC funding is an important and significant source of many individual graduate students and groups of graduate students to travel to conferences. Furthermore, some departments require that graduate students seek other sources of funding, like UPAC funding and travel grants from the professional or academic organization hosting the conference, prior to requesting travel funding support from their departments. This restriction on presenting personal research is not in the spirit of graduate education and results in restricting graduate students, especially those of lower socio-economic status who are already marginalized within the academy, from being able to have these educational experiences that are vital to their success in graduate school and beyond.

Ultimately, the current policies in place for obtaining student travel funding via UPAC are discriminatory against graduate students. The hearing process is intimidating for students and questioning whether they are presenting research should not be factored into the funding allocation decision.

**Recommended Course of Action:**

By adopting this resolution, the GPSA formally recommends the University Park Allocations Committee (UPAC) adopt the following or comparable policy changes.

1. We suggest that all mentions of presentation of personal research be removed from the UPAC Handbook as these places a burden on graduate students, as well as other students, who would like to receive UPAC funding but must present their research at a conference.

2. We suggest that UPAC remove this line of questioning from the hearing process.

Respectfully submitted,

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