



Sense of the Faculty: Eliminate health and wellness fees for graduate students

10 September 2021

Consistent with R&P 1.2.8.1, it is the sense of the faculty that the new "Health and Wellness" fee should be eliminated for all graduate students.

The establishment of a new Health and Wellness fee has significant negative financial impacts on our graduate students, an already financially vulnerable population. Graduate students are independently required to purchase health insurance. Thus, many graduate students have their own health care providers, and do not use the services provided by the Health and Wellness Center. Graduate students have reported feeling uncomfortable using the Health and Wellness Center since they may encounter undergraduate students whom they teach. Therefore, it is unlikely that many students in this population could be incentivized to use the Health and Wellness facilities. At a minimum, graduate students should have the option to "opt out" of paying this fee (or "opt in," for graduate students who expect to use the services).

Implementation of this new fee occurred without consultation, and without advanced communication, with affected parties (i.e. affected graduate students, graduate Associate Deans, graduate program directors, or Department Chairs). Itemization of expenses covered by this fee has also not been communicated to these parties.

Beyond the financial impacts, which are reason enough to eliminate this fee, its one-sided implementation has significant negative impacts on graduate student morale. The success of departmental graduate programs and faculty research depends on our ability to recruit and retain strong graduate students. In turn, our ability to recruit and retain strong graduate students requires that students are able to focus on their own academic and research priorities and not on their finances or on the application of new fees without prior notice.

The Faculty Senate strongly recommends the following actions:

1. That the mandatory Health and Wellness fee be eliminated for all graduate students. "Opt out," "Opt in," or "pay for service" fees may be appropriate instead.
2. That the administration establish a process for justifying suggested new fees to relevant parties, and for gathering feedback from relevant parties, before new fees are implemented.
3. That any changes in fee structure will be communicated to affected parties well in advance of the implementation date.

In a vote by the Faculty Senate, taken electronically from Sept 8-Sept 10, this sense of the faculty resolution was approved.

This sense of the faculty resolution will be submitted to President Joe Helble, Board of Trustees Chairman Kevin L. Clayton, Provost Nathan Urban, Vice President for Finance and Administration Patricia Johnson, and the Deans of the five Lehigh Colleges.

Respectfully submitted,

M. Kathryn Iovine
Chairperson of Faculty Senate