

Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs

Resolution to establish a campus working group to review and optimize the utilization of student activity fee for graduate and professional students

CGPSA 2025-2026B

Draft Notice Sent to University Council Cabinet	Date
First Reading by Commission	Date
Approval by Commission	Date
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Second Reading, University Council	Date
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WHEREAS, the student activity fee supports student activity programs, the student centers, student engagement personnel, and funds various activities as determined by the Student Budget Boards. This fee also supports the presence and engagement with the arts (beyond academic programs) for all students, and provides free or greatly reduced-cost access to various activities and cultural events for enrolled students¹; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has approximately 800 active student organizations², and among these, 113 are registered student organizations with graduate membership (exclusively graduate, mostly graduate, or evenly split between graduate and undergraduate students). The Graduate Student Budget Board has received funding applications from only 53 of these organizations (6.2% of all RSOs) this academic year until January 2026 indicating low engagement; and

WHEREAS, Other allocations of this fund are difficult to access, as public data is not readily available; and

WHEREAS, graduate and professional students often face significant academic, research, and assistantship obligations, most stay off campus, and many have families which limit their ability to participate in several activities funded by the student activity fee³; and;

WHEREAS, graduate and professional students have shown interest in activities with professional development opportunities, family-friendly programming, and activities aligned with their schedules and other restrictions³; and

WHEREAS, the lack of adequate value received out of this fee places an undue financial burden on graduate students; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Vice President for Student Affairs shall sponsor, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Creation of Work Groups, Task Forces, and other ad hoc Committees, and with the advice of all constituent groups, a Working Group consisting of members of the graduate student body, student affairs, graduate school, budget office, and other university offices that receive an allocation from this fee. The Vice President for Student Affairs shall choose a chair of the Working Group from their team, and a co-chair in consultation with the Graduate and Professional Student Senate; and

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Working Group shall be charged to provide a public report and recommendations, by the beginning of the Fall Semester 2025, to:

1. Study the allocation of the student activity fee to university offices and evaluate graduate and professional student participation and the overall benefit they receive from funded activities across all campuses;
2. Identify the types of activities, programs, and services that meet the graduate and professional students' needs and interest;
3. Recommend updated allocation strategies and new activities programs, and services to ensure that the student activity fee expenditure addresses the needs and interests of graduate and professional students.
4. Provide any additional recommendations necessary to ensure that the financial burden on graduate and professional students is reduced and that they receive adequate value from the student activity fee they pay.

REFERENCES:

1. Description of Fees for 2025-26:

https://www.bursar.vt.edu/content/dam/bursar_vt_edu/fees/Description%20of%20Fees%202025-26.pdf

2. https://campuslife.vt.edu/Student_Orgs.html

3. Appendix A (attached)



Appendix A

Qualitative Comments from a GPSS survey question on student activity fee

The following question was included in a survey sent to all GPSS senators in Fall 2025. The responses collected in the survey are shown in this appendix without names. Identifying information can be made available upon request.

Survey Question:

The student activity fee (part of our comprehensive fee) that graduate students pay is not utilized as much as it is by undergraduate students, who have many organizations and large events. To increase utilization, one approach could be to support the creation of more graduate student organizations and encourage existing orgs to host more number of events.

1. What do you think is the main obstacle for graduate students in starting or maintaining student orgs and hosting or participating in events? (E.g.: lack of time or energy to participate or not knowing about existing organizations and events.)
2. If you're not interested in events organized by existing student organizations, how would you prefer this fee to be used instead? (E.g.: organizing grad-only career fairs or professional development workshops focused on your discipline.)

Answers:

Definitely lack of time or energy, but also a lack of the number of people to attend niche interest groups. For example, I would love to host a STEM-specific craft night for graduate students, but am not sure people would attend, since graduate students are more busy and usually less outgoing than undergraduate students (since they are more "locked in" to their smaller social groups and usually just want to go home at the end of the day). My suggestion would be to find ways to support and strengthen those existing smaller social groups. Maybe that looks like letting departments apply for coffee & pastries funding from the graduate school on a monthly basis; maybe it looks like sponsoring social activities for specific colleges instead of just the graduate

school at large (I personally feel intimidated by the activities that seem very fun but perhaps exhausting if I'm going to show up and feel pressure to sit down at a table and talk to the same strangers for the whole hour out of fear of offending them; I guess another option is to host more dynamic activities that allow for shorter "bursts" of small talk to give me an excuse to break away from conversations if I'm not entirely interested/am uncomfortable). For example, a College of Engineering Field Day sounds like a blast, especially if there are also spaces/activities for people who want to spend time around people but are less athletically inclined. Other activities that focus less on sitting down and talking, too, I guess; like a jazzercise night or an archery/axe throwing pop-up or something. I'll also say, I would LOVE to have a grad student ball. How else am I supposed to find a reason to wear a pretty dress and go on a cute dancing date with my husband??

Grad students have more of a life outside of campus, so there is less time to participate in activities

1. I think several factors combined, mainly increased workload and responsibilities for graduate students and a sense of isolation from undergraduate portions of campus
2. While I appreciate student organizations in theory, I imagine professional development opportunities will be utilized more by the general grad population

I think most graduate students do not have time to participate in organizations on a regular basis. I think this fee could be better utilized by helping fund students to participate in events or workshops specific to their field to help them with networking and career advancement.

I don't agree with the fact that I am as a graduate student have to pay student fees, but I think it should be used as a conference fund or research fund.

1. Sense of belonging/community: most student orgs are undergrad-oriented, while the grad community at VT is fairly remote from the undergrads
2. YES grad-only career fair

Remove the fee

1. Time, graduate school much more like a full time job that you take home with you than undergrad. I'd rather not have the fee at all but would accept more things geared toward grad professional development like a workshop to make a CV.

1. Lack of time/energy to participate outside contracted work
2. Grad workshops in my discipline

1. Don't care

2. Stop with these excess fees. We all know that most of us rarely use this, and when GSBB has the money, they horribly mismanage it.

1. Most organizations are advertised to undergrads and not grad students, so mostly not knowing. 2. Career fairs aimed towards industry post masters/PhD.

If it's not being utilized it shouldn't be so high. I don't need more events I need to be able to afford groceries. I shouldn't be reliant on events to find food for the week.

1. There are already so many graduate student organizations, I don't think more is the answer. Instead, we should make things more accessible and frequent, like having weekly events that are at an accessible time.
2. Professional development is a good idea, but it should be understood that no one wants to go to PD after a long day in the lab, and it's hard to get away from the lab during the day. I think there should be a focus on high impact PD, like things to build the resume and having real contacts from industry speak about how to build a career.

Graduate students are too involved with their research to fully devote time to exploring new organizations, especially those coming from different undergraduate institutions. In order to better utilize this comprehensive fee, it would benefit the organizations to advertise themselves in some consolidated forum/website/event that graduate students are aware of. I believe there are already many grad-only opportunities for career fairs and workshops, and it's beneficial for graduate students to get involved in an organization outside of work, so the comprehensive fee should still go to student orgs.

Q1: The need to have funds before you can use funds (reimbursement structure).
Lack of awareness of ability to create GSOs

Q2: More travel funding, particularly for conferences. Small research funding for dissertation/thesis students (like GDRP). More social options to support grad students at large (monthly lunch retreats maybe)

Lack of time or energy to participate.
None of them. Just give it to the students.

Main obstacle: evening and 3 hour classes. This conflicts with when most other (non-graduate) students have available.

1. Lack of time, transitioning leadership year over year, shifting GSO priorities
2. Funding actual resources for us - access to software, more professional development, more perks