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SGA actions cause stir among graduate students

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For the past seven months, the Graduate Student Association has argued that the "SGA fee" that graduate students pay would better serve the graduate student community if it were dispersed directly to the GSA by UNCW in order to meet the unique, and often overlooked, needs of the graduate student community.

The issue seemed to have calmed down until recently when the GSA agreed to go through the SGA's process of requesting money from the SGA for their annual budget and the SGA decided to allot the GSA only a small percent of what was requested, which was not 100 percent of graduate student-fees to begin with. Seeing this as the serious situation as it is, the GSA sprung into action.

"There have been formal meetings with both groups to try and reach a compromise," said vice chancellor for Student Affairs, Patricia Leonard. "After reviewing the issues raised by both groups, I spoke to the SGA leadership indicating that I would recommend that the GSA be allocated 75 percent of the fees paid by graduate students," Leonard said. "My reasoning for this recommendation is that the GSA is trying to form themselves as a governing body for the graduate student body. It is the mission and vision of this university that the Graduate School grow both in



Nolan Dean/the Seahawk

Zack Wynne takes oath as SGA President Tuesday night. The SGA and GSA have been in disagreement over student fees this year.

quantity and quality; therefore, I thought by providing resources it would help."

"I have not had an opportunity to fully discuss this matter with the chancellor yet; therefore, I don't know for sure how this will be resolved," Leonard said. "What is most unfortunate in all of this is that the two student groups could not resolve this, and they are forcing the administration to get involved."

"I am extremely pleased with Vice Chancellor Leonard's recommendation ... The vice chancellor has shown that graduate students are an important part of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's community, and, through her recommendation, I

feel that GSA and the graduate community is a legitimate demographic with serious needs and issues that are and will be addressed," said Jenifer Bianchi, GSA President.

"We are fighting the recommendation of Vice Chancellor Leonard and will do so at every opportunity because we believe it undermines our policy of funding and divides the UNCW community," said SGA President, Zachary Wynne.

"From day one, GSA has asked for direct funding from the university, through fees paid by graduate students. What we want has precedent and is modeled throughout North Carolina and the United States," Bianchi said.

"We're only asking for a portion of our own fees. We just want to use our money in ways that benefit our work," said Pat Moyer, GSA Advisory Board, and previous GSA President.

"Our primary goal has been to provide graduate students with funds to travel to professional conferences and for research. These conferences are paramount for graduate students, as they provide excellent networking opportunities, chances to present their own and observe other's research, and gain feedback from professionals outside of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington," Bianchi said.

"We tried to show them that the graduate students have different priorities in funding needs. There are also genuine concerns about conflict of interest," said Pat Moyer.

"If you think about it, it's highly inappropriate for Teaching Assistants to appear in front of their students or former students asking for funds, and it does happen in this kind of set-up," Moyer said.

"Our experience so far has demonstrated that SGA still does not understand the crucial differences in our situations. They don't seem to fully appreciate our critical need for funds for conferences and research," Moyer said.

Moyer explains another concern of the GSA - that the fees paid by graduate students is not allocated back to the graduate student community. "In their own

words, SGA officers indicate that they use graduate fees to fund other groups. SGA officers state in their e-mail to student organization leaders that if GSA receives their fees it will 'greatly reduce the amount of funds that will be available to all student organizations next year (\$11,000)," Moyer said.

The main concern that SGA has mentioned it has is GSA's ability to manage their budget. "Vice Chancellor Leonard assured them last night that policies and procedures would be set in place, training would be provided to the graduate students handling the financials, if this recommendation passes and we would have oversight from UNCW administration just as they have. But SGA continued to have concerns," Moyer said.

"I will say that we are not against the GSA, but they are in a sense fighting against the Student Government - they are fighting the policy, but we are not fighting them on what they want overall (we agree they as grad students have different needs, and we want to help them take care of those needs)," Wynne said.

"SGA has a budget in the neighborhood of \$450,000 and GSA's share for next year is \$17,288 divided among four graduate groups. We cannot understand their anger about graduate students controlling how that money is spent. We never wanted this to become adversarial," Moyer said.

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