

Good Afternoon. I appreciate your time here today as you are about to discuss perhaps the most significant issue facing this University's graduate community in some time. As the president of the Rackham Student Government, I represent all of Rackham's approximately 7,000 graduate students, including every Ph.D. student here at Michigan.

Starting in the Fall of 2007, members of the Rackham Graduate School's executive board have been investigating various forms of a continuous enrollment policy. Over the course of the past two years, and specifically over the last ten months, the Rackham Student Government has been facilitating conversation amongst Rackham students to provide basic information about the policy to students and also to gauge the student reactions. From the results of a recent survey of students, it's honestly a mixed bag. Even with our best efforts and those of Rackham, a significant number of students are still clueless about the new policy. Of the remaining students, many have been fed misinformation. Of the group that has the correct information, some are supportive, especially in the biological and physical sciences. For example, many of these students cited increased access to University services (like the University Recreation Centers and the University Health Service, to name a few) as a possible benefit of the policy. Many students (primarily in the social sciences), however, are concerned about the policy's financial flexibility given their discipline's unique requirements, especially concerning thesis research beyond the city limits. These concerns are not unfounded. Under the status quo, students engaging in field work are typically not enrolled, thus removing tuition burdens from their sponsoring departments. It is not unreasonable for students to initially think that new tuition requirements could mean financial pressures to finish degrees faster, at the academic expense of cutting edge research. Discussions about the policy prior to the proposal's passage were hypothetical and a bit too vague to resolve this very legitimate concern.

Despite these financial concerns, Rackham has marketed the policy as revenue neutral and there is no reason to believe that that goal will change should tuition changes be approved. Still, though, the cluelessness and/or uncertainty of a significant number of our students, coupled to the published hostility a few students have expressed toward the policy indicate that much more SUBSTANTIVE communication is necessary. To that end, Rackham Student Government has worked with Rackham to form a student advisory committee to address the remaining concerns of the policy's implementation. The entire Ph.D. student body was solicited for participation on this advisory committee, and Rackham Student Government worked to form a committee that represents the varied viewpoints we compiled in our recent survey. The committee has met twice already, with good participation during its first meeting and substantive clarification of many misunderstandings. Unfortunately, though, a much lower turnout showed for the committee's second meeting. Committee meetings will continue and we hope that, together, we can come to a better understanding.

Should you, the Regents, approve the tuition changes required to make continuous enrollment a reality, it should come with the written understanding that the policy's key stakeholders are to communicate frequently, equally, and effectively BEFORE the policy is actually implemented. With the policy's passage and removal of the hypothetical, Rackham should be required to provide students with SPECIFIC answers to questions including detailed scenarios on how the policy would affect students in different areas and with different needs. These answers should also indicate that many student concerns are indeed just concerns, and not threats to academic quality and/or financial accessibility. Where threats are real, student input needs to be a part of the realized policy. An email sent to students yesterday from Dean Weiss is encouraging, as it appears that Rackham supports what we believe is necessary. At the same time, students need to continue to come to the table with an open mind, face-to-face with Rackham administrators, to make sure that their voices are a part of the implementation process.

Thank you for again for your time.