

Graduate Student Government Response

On September 16, the GradGov Executive Board submitted a petition with over 1,500 graduate student signatures to Dean Sens and Provost Groves requesting a re-evaluation of the 2019-2020 tuition discount for graduate and professional students at Georgetown University. Graduate students were given a 5% tuition discount for the Fall semester, while undergraduate students were given a 10% tuition discount. The University's attempted justification for the disparity relied in part on an anticipated return to a hybrid status for graduate students, but as of October 9, our seventh week of classes, all Georgetown students, graduate and undergraduate alike, remain online.

GradGov has decided to publish the administration's response to our petition so that it will be a matter of public record. We believe this response represents a biased outlook of campus life, and distorts the value of an in-person experience. The response suggests that community building and extracurricular events are not as valuable or as important to graduate students. The response also does not recognize the arduous academic burdens imposed on graduate students by the transition to online instruction. Many graduate programs have no substitute for in-person, hands-on instruction causing some programs to close and others to meet in person despite denial of several university protections granted to undergraduates. Graduate students are missing out on building personal connections with advisors and mentors whose assistance they require in order to apply to PhD programs, obtain research grants, and guide their career decisions.

The administration's response focuses on how the undergraduate experience is special without considering what makes the graduate experience special. Georgetown must acknowledge the obvious, as other reputable universities have: the in-person elements of graduate programs have comparable value to the in-person elements of undergraduate programs. The Administration's suggestion to the contrary reveals an offensive disregard for the graduate student experience at Georgetown. The only acceptable remedy is an equitable tuition discount.

Georgetown University's Response to the Graduate Students' petition for a 10% tuition discount

Dear GradGov students,

Thank you for your email and the attached petition to the university requesting reconsideration of Fall tuition decisions. We know a great deal of thought went into producing this document.

Decisions about tuition and fee levels are immensely complex because we must balance the needs of a range of community members. In addition, the University is committed to providing the best possible Georgetown education, and at the same time, to providing financial support for as many Masters and Ph.D. students as possible.

In the case of making decisions about the Fall semester, we reviewed the needs of graduate students and undergraduate students. We granted a greater discount to undergraduate students largely because the residential experience, and the many activities that come with it, are ordinarily such a crucial component of a Georgetown undergraduate experience. While we know that graduate students appreciate extracurricular activities like artistic and athletic events, these are a more heavily accessed feature of residential life on campus for undergraduates. Dormitory life including the support systems that allow undergraduates to learn to live independently of parents, the supports needed for residential life, extracurricular activities such as theatre, performing arts, vocal groups, club sports, special interest group clubs such as cultural group clubs, off-site engagements, political action clubs, business-focused clubs, and orientation programming all require a support structure needed at a much reduced level while students are not in residence. Likewise, undergraduate athletic teams and athletic events require a much reduced set of resources as a result of non-residential living.

You reference the timing of decision-making in your letter. It is an unfortunate result of the COVID-19 pandemic that many students at both the graduate and undergraduate level had rental commitments by the time the pandemic struck and by the time the university made the decision to offer virtual learning for Fall classes based upon the progression of the pandemic in early summer. Still, we hope to return to campus as soon as is practicable, and continue to explore our options to do so.

Your needs are very important to us. To address increased financial needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, we established the [COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) allowing us to support graduate students in recent weeks and months.

Students who have suffered a significant change of financial condition should see the [Office of Student Financial Services](#) to request a reevaluation of their circumstances.

We understand you have asked for a date after which students would not be invited to return to campus. While we recognize that this is a reasonable request, we need to be cautious about providing a specific date. Some courses, including those that require an on-site component such as those serving our new F-1 Visa students, will need to be able to meet on campus for limited times. In addition, we continue to explore the possibilities for running small pilot studies of graduate classes that are hybrid in nature this Fall that will inform future decisions about who can return and at what time.

Lastly, when these decisions were made we intended to and still plan to bring students back to campus as soon as public health conditions allow. We continue to examine the progression of the pandemic, public health conditions, and testing within our community. We want you to know that we hear you and appreciate your outreach. We can't wait to be together on campus at the earliest possible safe date.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Groves
Provost

Alexander Sens
Interim Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences