

# Mandatory fees are just tuition by another name

Melissa Zimdars 3:39 p.m. CST January 30, 2015



(Photo: (Special to the Press-Citizen))

Only a few years ago, graduate employees at the University of Iowa finally negotiated a 100 percent tuition reimbursement with UI and the Iowa state Board of Regents as part of all teaching and research assistant contracts. Before the reimbursement, UI was in the bottom of the Big Ten in terms of graduate employee compensation, which makes it difficult for academic departments — even if they are highly ranked within their fields and nationally known — to attract promising graduate students who not only produce innovative and notable research, but who are also quality educators, which both have numerous benefits to the state of Iowa as a whole.

But as soon COGS (Campaign to Organize Graduate Students), the graduate student union at the University of Iowa, won this multi-year fight for 100 percent tuition reimbursement, UI turned around and, yet again, raised the amount of mandatory fees that students pay each year. Fees are just tuition by another name, and the promise of providing 100 percent tuition reimbursement while still charging students \$1,000 a year in fees is an insidious practice. Furthermore, this allows the University of Iowa and Board of Regents to maintain claims that tuition rates are frozen or kept low despite continuing increases to the overall cost of education, which is especially troubling given the fact that Iowa students rank sixth in the nation in terms of their student debt burdens.

Making matters worse is the fact that our governor and state legislators have drastically reduced the amount of funding given to all of Iowa's public universities, with 67 percent of the University of Iowa's funds coming from the state in 2000 going down to only 35 percent as of 2012. Decreases in state funding then equate to increases in tuition and fees, which according to the Iowa Policy Project, have gone up 260 percent and 500 percent, respectively, for students at the University of Iowa since the 2000-01 academic school year.

About 33 percent of University of Iowa graduate employees hold quarter-time appointments that pay an annual stipend of \$9,040 per year. This is \$2,630 below the federal poverty level per year for a single adult. The COGS-negotiated 100 percent tuition reimbursement significantly helped in mitigating these low annual salaries, but then the mandatory fees started piling up. For quarter-time appointed teaching and research assistants, the cost of fees is equivalent to each of them giving back more than 10 percent of their annual salaries to UI as a condition of their employment. How many of you have to pay to work or to maintain the buildings in which you work?

Fed up with having the university's budget balanced on their backs, more than 1,000 graduate employees and graduate employee supporters recently signed a petition calling for the University of Iowa and Board of Regents to reimburse 100 percent of their mandatory fees. This would not only alleviate the financial hardship experienced by many graduate students, who have 66 percent of all the contact hours with students at the University of Iowa despite their compensation comprising about 2 percent of UI's total operating budget, but it also would fulfill the promise UI made years ago of 100 percent tuition reimbursement since fees and tuition are essentially the same.

While 100 percent fee reimbursement would be a drop in the bucket for UI, considering it amounts to .26 percent of the 2015 general education fund, for the 2,300 graduate employees on campus, a 100 percent fee reimbursement would significantly improve the quality of life for many financially struggling graduate students. While it's great to see another tuition freeze for in-state undergraduates, UI, the Board of Regents and Iowa state legislators need to seriously consider and address the financial burden of all students attending Iowa's regent universities.

In conclusion, if Iowa can afford to keep Sally Mason on as president emeritus at the cost of \$300,000 a year, it can also afford to start adequately compensating a majority of its educators.

Melissa Zimdars is a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Iowa Department of Communication Studies.

Read or Share this story: <http://icp-c.com/1CIGmMJ>

## MORE STORIES



Daily editorial cartoons

(<http://beta.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/opinion/cartoons/2012/09/18/daily->

editorial-  
cartoons/1411813/)  
(<http://beta.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/opinion/cartoons/2012/09/18/daily-editorial-cartoons/1411813/>)  
Feb. 11, 2015, 1:35 p.m.



**Dobrian column makes me question P-C judgment**

(/story/opinion/readers/2015/02/12/joseph-dobrian-column-press-citizen-judgment/23287737/)  
(/story/opinion/readers/2015/02/12/joseph-dobrian-column-press-citizen-judgment/23287737/)  
Feb. 12, 2015, 9:15 a.m.



**Dobrian's column a reminder**

(/story/opinion/readers/2015/02/12/joseph-dobrian-column-reminder/23287275/)  
(/story/opinion/readers/2015/02/12/joseph-dobrian-column-reminder/23287275/)  
Feb. 12, 2015, 9:04 a.m.