Competitive funding for doctoral education

Premises
• Talented graduate students are essential for high quality graduate programs.
• Less able students often take longer to complete their degrees.
• Based on national surveys, BU’s stipends are below the top quartile. Low stipends limit recruitment of well qualified students. They negatively impact “best practices” and recruitment and retention of faculty.
• Because “enhancements” to stipends are not guaranteed from year to year, they have limited recruitment value.
• Graduate stipends need to be increased on average by $4,000 and then by 3-5% per year, depending on discipline.
• Scale of problem: For 2006-07, minimal cost is an additional $2 million, and by 2010-11, $3.3 million.
• The University has so many competing demands (e.g., hiring more faculty) that it cannot cover these costs.
• Resources will continue to be constrained. The University cannot depend on substantial increases from New York State.
• Solving this problem will require graduate programs to contribute by reallocation of resources and generation of new funds.
• Binghamton is a doctoral research campus, and funding doctoral education must have priority over master’s education.
• Funding doctoral students adequately is essential, and programs must share the responsibility.

Immediate goals for the University
• Maintain programs that have attained national & international recognition for research, scholarship & graduate education
• Assist programs that are on the verge of such recognition

Proposal
• The University is adding $1 million to the stipend fund!
  • But that won’t solve the problem for 2006-07 or in subsequent years.
  • It is necessary to combine this increase with reallocation to help address the gap and the annual increasing cost.
  • Reallocation will be phased in:
    • Limited support from Graduate School for “master’s only” students
    • 4 years maximum for stipends and tuition scholarships for doctoral students from the Graduate School
    • Graduate School tuition support beyond 4th year of doctoral study only when student has an external fellowship, Binghamton Foundation fellowship, Clark Fellowship, or research project assistantship with grant paying tuition
    • Unit’s responsibility for any doctoral support beyond 4th year (e.g., via summer & winter session revenue, adjunct teaching, research project assistants on grants, training grants). Many units already restrict Graduate School support to 1-4 years.
• Units must assist with generation of new funds (e.g., increase in self-supporting master’s students, research project assistants on grants, training grants, external fellowships).

Rationale for change in funding
• In the past, a BA/BS degree was sufficient for a successful professional career; now it requires a master’s degree. In general, BU cannot afford to subsidize either degree.
• Other public research universities, including Stony Brook, Buffalo and Albany, are already restricting support of “master’s only” students.
• Other public universities provide support for doctoral students over less time than Binghamton.
• For example, 4 years at $12,000/yr at Stony Brook in contrast to 5 years at $8,000/yr at Binghamton.
• Stony Brook’s doctoral funding is for 1-4 years, depending on discipline; Albany and Buffalo limit doctoral funding to 3 years.
• Providing higher stipends in a concentrated period increases quality of students recruited, reduces attrition, improves time-to-degree, reduces student debt, and increases number of doctorates. And placement of graduates is quantitatively and qualitatively good.
• Upcoming National Research Council doctoral study, which will then be repeated every three years, will rank programs on the above statistics rather than by reputation of program. Students (and US News & World Report) will have access to these data! By improving these statistics, this new policy will indirectly facilitate recruitment of faculty and students.
• The National Research Council reports time-to-degree has increased unnecessarily. That increase hurts recruitment into graduate school, especially of minorities; it creates heavy debt load; it promotes high attrition (~50% nationally and at BU); and in effect wastes university’s resources.
• Nationally graduate students are increasingly older, more ethnically diverse, more likely to have a family, and carrying more debt, all of which makes the time-to-degree an even bigger issue than in the past.

Result
• Competitive doctoral stipends guaranteed for 4 years (provided student is making satisfactory progress)
• Maintenance of and increase in quality programs because well-qualified students are enrolled, students have competitive support for at least four years, and average time-to-degree can be reduced.
• In turn, all programs, including undergraduate, master’s, and faculty research and scholarship, benefit.