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Support the Union

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

TWO WEEKS AGO, Victor Jones, dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, signed, sealed, and delivered an announcement to all graduate students, informing them that the GSAS special tuition write-off program for teaching fellows in need of aid will be terminated at the end of the year. The students have not received the announcement in silence.

Instead, 435 of them have formed a union to demand that the GSAS rescind the decision and guarantee that there will be no reduction in the income of teaching fellows next year. We support this demand.

Dean Jones has asserted that abolishing the tuition write-off, or Staff Tuition Scholarship (STS) program and distributing the funds now used to support it through the GSAS's general scholarship budget are necessary to achieve an equitable distribution of scholarship funds and to improve the School's ability to handle problems of financial need. Certainly, we are not opposed to making the distribution of scholarships more equitable. But we oppose any modification of the Staff Tuition Scholarship system which would reduce the amount of aid going to each teaching fellow.

While STS is technically a form of financial aid, under the rules of the STS program these "scholarships" have been available to any teaching fellow whose income was below a certain cut-off point (currently, $6000 a year for a single student). In practical terms, the scholarships are part of the real income which teaching fellows have received for the real work they do. The teaching fellows have a right to expect that they will continue to receive this payment for their services in the future.

WITHOUT ABANDONING our position on this point, we would like to note that the graduate students may be overestimating the loss they will suffer if the STS program is abolished. We think Dean Jones is largely to blame.

By his frequent references to the projected $2.5 million decline in outside aid which the GSAS is facing, he has crested the impression that the $800,000 being taken from the STS program will be distributed, through the School's general scholarship budget, to cover the entire "deficit" in outside aid and that much of it will go to provide support for incoming students.

While Jones has stated that teaching fellows in financial need would be eligible for scholarship support next year under the new system, most of them logically assume that there won't be much money if Jones tries to replace $2.5 million with $800,000.

It seems that Jones has no intention of trying such a feat, however. At his meeting with graduate students last Monday, he said that there would be very few new students entering with promises of aid next year in consequence of the enormous drop in outside aid. And last Wednesday, he told the Crimson "the group that's going to be hit most (by the drop in aid) is the group that's not here now and will never be here." He also told the Crimson Wednesday that "the same amount of (Harvard aid) money will be directed to the continuing
students next year." This suggests that the GSAS does not plan to spread the STS money over as large a group as many teaching fellows seem to fear. We think Dean Jones should have made this point more clearly in his letter to the graduate students or at his meeting with them.

Jones has announced that the GSAS may reinstitute separate scholarship programs for teaching fellows and entering students, so that it will be clear to everyone how much the teaching fellows are getting. He has not yet said how much that will be. Apparently, it will be less than they are getting this year, but perhaps not drastically less.

Clearly, a "slight" decline in support for teaching fellows is not acceptable, nor is any plan which requires that the teaching fellows wait and see how much aid they will receive next year or in following years. But Jones could have reduced the tension of the present situation a good deal by making clearer to the teaching fellows how the new aid system would affect them.

THE GRADUATE Students Union has been careful to stipulate that the continuation of the STS program "must not come at the expense of the pay of the University's non-professional employees; the scholarships of non-teaching graduate or undergraduate students; or the quality of graduate or undergraduate education (that is, there must not be increases in class sizes, teaching loads, or the amount of work required per fifth of teaching salary)." To ensure that the University conforms with this stipulation, the union has insisted, as its second demand, that the University make a "full, detailed disclosure of its total operating budget." We give this demand our full support and look forward to the opportunity such a disclosure will provide for an open discussion of the way the University's resources are spent.

Because its resources are now much scarcer than they have been, the University will have to make choices in the years ahead to abandon some programs in order to continue others. It will almost certainly have to do this in order to continue the Staff Tuition Scholarship program. The University community has the right and should receive the information it needs to participate in these choices.

As its third demand, the Graduate Students Union has called for the University to rescind its decision to extend full tuition charges to third-year graduate students beginning the year after next. The University currently charges graduate students a reduced tuition of $1000 after their second year since they ordinarily stop taking courses beyond that point.

In view of the decreasing availability of scholarships, increasing tuition from $1000 to the full $3000 for third-year students will mean a Severe increase in the present or future (loan) burden placed on them, and does not seem reasonable given the reduced cost of third-year students to the University.

The union has also demanded that the "junior rate" for teaching be abolished--that all teaching fellows receive the same pay--and that the STS program cover all, rather than three-fourths, of the tuition of 1st or 2nd year teaching fellows. We also support these demands.

FINALLY, we must condemn Dean Jones for his inexcusable failure to consult the graduate students before announcing the termination of the STS program. His explanation that there was a "problem of time" is simply unconvincing. Jones's disrespect for the rights and interests of the students affected by this decision demonstrate why it was necessary for them to form a union. We demand that the University recognize this union as the bargaining agent for the graduate students and teaching fellows, so that, in the future, they will be assured a role in decisions which directly affect them.