

Good afternoon!

It is a pleasure to speak to you again. Again, I do not take this lightly and am humbled that you listen to the updates that the Graduate-Professional Student Association has to give you.

GPSA has started our ASPIRE stem outreach initiative. On October 25, GPSA hosted 45 middle and high school students from three Title I schools within Rockdale County School System. A vast majority of these students want to present research at the Georgia Science and Engineering Fair. These students came to campus, seeking guidance on furthering their research on topics ranging from ecology to building design. We had 36 volunteers to help mentor these students and help them create a more robust research model. After a morning of mentorship, students were taken on tours of labs across South Campus.

GPSA is invested in providing research opportunities to these students, many of which are not encouraged to dig deep and expand their research. Most of their dreams are seen as far-fetched, or even unattainable. However, the most encouraging quote from that day was from a high school senior who, after being mentored and touring the facilities, stated: "This was, literally, the best day of my life." Being able to facilitate an experience that students can cherish is not just our mission as an organization, but the mission of the university. We seek to provide life-changing experiences through higher education; to help those who need it; and to strengthen our state and our nation by providing equipped and qualified citizens.

Recent events in both chambers of Congress seek to upend the goals and future of higher education. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Bill, also known as H.R. 1, seeks to implement changes that wholly disenfranchise graduate and professional students; further burden those with student loan payments; and, discourage the continuation of higher education as a whole.

Currently, the House is looking to count tuition waivers, provided to graduate and professional students, as forms of income. Currently, only our monthly stipends are taxable income. By treating a tuition waiver as taxable income, a graduate student will be faced with paying an additional tax on the tuition waiver even though no additional income will be earned.

This affects graduate and professional students greatly, as this would place many students in a higher tax bracket, leading to higher taxation on a meager stipend that will likely not increase to offset the additional tax. In fact, graduate and professional students will become one of the highest-taxed populations in the country, based on income. Enacting this bill would also lead to declining populations of out-of-state and international graduate and professional students, as the cost of attendance could more than double the current cost of attendance.

Be aware that this will also affect the needs of tuition reduction for all, including employee tuition-reimbursement programs and tuition reductions for employees of universities and colleges. Many employees depend on tuition reductions to return to school. Taxing tuition reductions for professionals seeking to continue their education while still working, as well as those working for universities and colleges in the state of Georgia, would likely create a reduction in a highly skilled workforce.

Language in the proposed bill seeks to repeal the current Student Loan Interest Deduction (SLID). This deduction allows an individual, with an income of \$80,000 or less, repaying students loans to deduct up to \$2,500 in student loan interest paid over the year. For these individuals, a portion of the interest paid can be recouped, allowing some relief from the pressure of student loan debt. Section 1204 also allows for students to claim tax benefits on qualifying educational expenses, including qualified tuition and related expenses (i.e. books and computers). By eliminating this benefit, students and their families are further burdened by the rising cost of education.

Repealing the Lifetime Learning Credit would negatively impact graduate and professional students.

Under the Lifetime Learning Credit, a student receives a tax credit equaling twenty percent of the first \$10,000 spent on qualified education expenses, with the maximum credit equaling \$2,000. By repealing this credit, graduate and professional students will have yet another tax deduction taken from them.

While the proposed bill does expand American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC), it only provides reduced support for a fifth year of higher education. Under its current application, the AOTC does not allow those who have completed four years of higher education to claim this credit. This credit, in the current and proposed applications, automatically precludes those who wish to continue their education, such as graduate and professional students, as well as undergraduate students who may take five or more years to complete their education. By eliminating the Lifetime Learning Credit, it is more likely that individuals will opt out of furthering their education or complete training for their careers.

The proposed bill suggests changes to the state and local tax (SALT) deduction, purportedly to cut the amount of taxes payable at those levels. Lower taxes normally equate to smaller budgets, which in turn cause cuts to vital public services, such as public education. In a report from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, the state of Georgia has cut support of higher education from seventy percent in 2007 to approximately fifty percent in 2015. This cut has required students to pay more for their education. There is a direct correlation between decreased appropriations and the burdening of students within the state of Georgia. By proposing a smaller amount paid to the state and local governments, the proposed bill cuts at the ability for higher education in the state of Georgia to produce an effective electorate.

Other disheartening language includes taxation on endowments and donations. Colleges and universities in the state of Georgia rely on endowments and donations to provide scholarship opportunities for all students, from graduate and professional students, student-athletes, and low-

income students. The money donated to our colleges and universities are a gift of affinity and support from community leaders and alumni, not a form of income to be levied against us.

I and Vice President Michael Snell wrote the letter presented on the projector for your review. We partnered with graduate student organizations from Georgia Tech, Augusta University, Emory University, Georgia Southern, Kennesaw State, and Georgia State to create a joint response to voice our concerns regarding this proposed bill. The University System of Georgia has heard our collective concerns and stand behind us. I have heard from many administrators who have expressed support. I am asking you, the faculty, for support. I would like to make a motion to submit the letter as an agenda item to the University Council's agenda.