MDRF Recommendation Vote – December Senate Meeting 2016

MDRF Committee Recommendation	GSA Recommendation
1. Adopt MDRF Statement of Mission and Purpose to be posted on the GSA Webpage and MDRF Application form: The Mark Diamond Research Fund (MDRF) is designed to provide support to University at Buffalo graduate students in need of financial assistance to carry out projects necessary for the progression or completion of their degree program. For applicants, the purpose of the grant is to help defray the costs associated with project completion as outlined by MDRF guidelines, as well as to provide an opportunity for students to develop and receive feedback on their grant writing skills. For reviewers, the purpose of the grant is to provide didactic experience on the grant review process. *Rationale: To identify and characterize the core mission of the MDRF as both a funding resource and a pedagogical program aimed at building the grant writing skills and professional experience of the GSA's constituency.*	GSA supports this idea

2. a) Create "Services Committee" to bifurcate review and award process, structured broadly so this committee can act as fact-finding body for other GSA services on behalf of the Senate when called on. Committee not to hold general Executive Authority over MDRF.
b) Committee to be constituted by 1 GSA Officer, 1 stipend admin from GSA Editing Services, 1 stipend-admin from MDRF, 1 stipend admin from GSA Programming, and 5 GSA Senators (total 9 seats).
c) All grievances received at GSA regarding MDRF policy, procedure, and/or grant awards (not staff grievances which are directed to the Office of the Vice President) to be heard by "Services Committee," which then presents its report to the GSA Senate.
 	
Rationale: a) Provides routine policy apparatus to facilitate oversight of MDRF and other GSA services through collaboration of senators, officers, and stipend staff. Also serves to bifurcate the review and award
	GSA is in support of the committee, but not as a dispersing agent for MDRF funds.
	o Reasoning:
	  ■ The Review Council volunteers are the ones who read all of the applications and should be making funding decisions
	  ■ Checks and balances are handled through GSA E-board oversight
	o We would still support creation of a committee to address other issues and to get more students actively involved in GSA as part of Constitution revisions

components of the MDRF program to both remove any potential conflict of interest, and once again, allow for more routine assessment of account balances to ensure program sustainability. *b) Creates greater utility within the Services Committee by including the stipend staff from the other main GSA Services.* *c) Allows for more precise fact-finding and testimony to be placed in a formal report to be delivered to Senate for purposes of voting on an issue. The Senate as a whole is an unwieldy body for such an exercise.*	
3. a) Create Asst. Director stipend position for MDRF to serve as pipeline to Directorship to better facilitate the continuation of institutional knowledge in face of routine staff turnover. b) E-mails be sent to Department Chairs and Department GSAs after each award cycle listing that department's award recipients and all award recipients be posted conspicuously by GSA on social media and hard copy at Departmental Club lounges twice annually. c) MDRF staff to create procedure/operations manual to be opened to period of public comment and reviewed by "Services Committee" recommended in 0623-1. d) MDRF staff to create resubmission form that clearly articulates the suggested changes that must be included with resubmission of application if any deference to be given to prior Review Council's recommendations. e) All communications soliciting MDRF application to departments should also solicit students to sit on Review Councils to further encourage disciplinary diversity amongst the reviewers. f) MDRF Staff to run short (i.e. ~20 to 40 minute) orientation/training sessions (i.e. perhaps 2 per week) for review council volunteers on staggered schedules in the weeks prior to a Review Council meeting—each first-time reviewer must attend one such session. g) When feasible, preference should be given to first-time reviewers on Review Councils. *Rationale: a) Allows significant administrative program duties to be divided between two (2) staffers while also increasing the likelihood that*	GSA supports this idea [already implemented by e-board]

institutional knowledge will carry over from one year to the next within the stipend student staff. *b) Raises awareness of grant program, and its dual functions: (1) providing funding to eligible graduate students; and, (2) allowing eligible graduate students to obtain experience on Review Councils.* *c) Seeks to preserve and transfer institutional/procedural knowledge in the face of routine stipend staff turnover (i.e. MDRF Director and Assistant).* *d) To ensure that applicants given direction to Revise and Resubmit by one Review Counsel do not fall into the spiral of successive rounds of new revision requests from each successive Review Council. This may also serve to expedite the review of previously re-submittals.* *e) To further promote Review Council service as a valuable pedagogical and professional-skill-building tool.* *f) While seeking to minimize the burden on the MDRF staff, this orientation will help acclimate first-time reviewers to the process and ensure Review Council meetings are as efficient and effective as possible.* *g) To ensure that the benefit of Review Council membership is accessible to all interested constituents of the GSA, while also allowing flexibility in the process, and not excluding returning reviewers who certainly bring value and experience to the process.*	

4. a) Separate, non-cumulative funding caps for Masters and Ph.D. students based solely on enrollment status in HUB: $3,000 for Ph.D. students and $1,500 for Master Students with $4,500 lifetime cap regardless of the number of degree programs a student undertakes. Services Committee charged with review of sustainability over first 3 grant cycles.
b) Total funding per student over life of student's UB Graduate career not to exceed $4,500 regardless of how many programs in which student may be enrolled.
c) Funding receipt per individual based on current active grant award close date. If reapplying within 12 months, must have submitted a grant closure form (exhausted funds or no longer using funds).
d) Applications for Final Projects in current degree programs to be given a two (2) point bonus not to exceed the maximum score.
	GSA supports raising the lifetime funding cap to $4,000, but does not support the $500 increase to the Ph.D. level (as per the GSA Finance Committee recommendation) nor the reapplication within the same degree program.
	   o Reasoning:
	      ▪ We have already made multiple changes to MDRF (new point system, electronic submission starting in the Spring, more outreach, increasing the number of offered workshops, personal consultations, detailed feedback for resubmissions), which have led to increased allocations. We need to see how those changes impact the fund before we decide to increase maximums.

e) MFA student awards to remain at $2,000 based on longstanding policy and logic, but still subject to $4,500 lifetime maximum cap. *Rationale: a) Programs vary widely in their structure. Some programs are straight B.A./B.S. to Ph.D., others require enrollment for an M.A./M.S. prior to enrollment in a Ph.D., and yet others are terminal M.A./M.S. programs. Thus, limiting funding based on the perceived trajectory of M.A./M.S. to Ph.D. is inequitable across the entirety of the GSA's constituency. Further, the GSA can only rely on one's current registration status to determine eligibility (e.g. M.A./M.S., M.F.A., Ph.D., etc.), and cannot reasonably make discernments or exceptions to financial policy based on the internal structure of any one department's graduate degree programs. Further, the recommended "Services Committee" can more closely watch the account balances and cash flow to ensure no overages are incurred.* *b) Raising the lifetime cap is necessary to facilitate the recommended funding paradigm found in 0706-3. Raising the cap does not necessarily ensure that all awardees will max out their lifetime award. Further, the recommended "Services Committee" can more closely watch the account balances and cash flow to ensure no overages are incurred.* *c) Necessary for financial control and to ensure adherence to lifetime funding cap given the ability of individual students to submit for multiple awards within their graduate student career at UB.* *d) Gives a small benefit to student nearing the end of their degree program in the point-penalty system to ensure they are able to vie for funding prior to their graduation.* *e) Serves to clearly indicate that the MDRF Policy Committee did not change this particular level of funding.*	▪ $500 increases were just made 2 years ago to all levels. ▪ We may consider increases in the near future if reserves remain high, but we would want to increase funding at all levels, and not just for PhDs. ▪ We want to give preference to those for whom this is the first learning experience (since the grant is primarily a learning grant)
5. Point penalty system will remain for review process, which shall include four (4) suggested funding levels: (1) 100 to 90 point score at 100% funding requested; (2) 80 to 89 point score at 90% of requested funding; (3) 70 to 79 point score at 80% of requested funding; and, (4) 69 point scores and below are encouraged to resubmit with revisions as necessary.	GSA supports this idea o MDRF already has this scoring system in place

Rationale: The prior point score scheme recommended in 0721-3 provided successive 20% penalties (reducing awards down to 60% at the base funding level), which were later considered rather severe. Thus, the Committee resolved to adjust this percentage penalty system to more closely mirror the current system in place at the MDRF.	

6. Funding eligibility open to any project undertaken in furtherance of the eligible graduate student's pursuit of their degree per faculty and student written attestation, and not be limited to solely "final projects."
 	
 Rationale: Departments vary in their requirements for final projects, and each component of one's degree program as verified by an academic advisor is important towards the completion of that degree. Further, as this program is partly pedagogical in nature, this goal can be accomplished regardless of the timing of the award in one's degree pursuit, and the recommended "Services Committee" can more closely watch the account balances and cash flow to ensure no overages are incurred.
	GSA does not support this idea
	   o Reasoning:
	      ▪ Departments will use this as justification to reduce funding for pre-final projects
	      ▪ We will clarify that any stage of the final project (including pilot studies) may be funded

7. Grammar penalty to remain as means of objectively assessing applications.
 	
 Rationale: Applications are not judged on their individual merits as viable or original research within their disciplines or fields—this is not the purpose of the MDRF. Thus, other uniform standards must be applied to rank applications. As both UB and the GSA provide professional editing services, and the majority of students surveyed indicated support of this policy, the MDRF Policy Committee voted unanimously to keep this small point-penalty item in the MDRF process.
	GSA does not support this idea
	   o Reasoning:
	      ▪ There currently is no penalty for grammar, but there are points for clarity of the application. Therefore, there is no need to penalize an applicant twice for the same thing.
	      ▪ Discriminates against ESL students