

Open Letter to Provost Joy Connolly and Director of Information Technology Services
Elaine Montilla Concerning IT Services and the Student Tech Fee

Dear Provost Connolly and Assistant Vice President for IT Montilla,

We, student representatives of the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council (DSC), recognize the essential importance of technology services and resources in order to advance our scholarly research projects. As students and researchers of the Graduate Center, we take some responsibility seeing that technology services and resources are maintained such that they may best serve the interests of doctoral and graduate students at the Graduate Center. We believe we can best serve these interests in a manner that is mutually beneficial to students both at the Graduate Center and in satellite programs housed in other CUNY campuses, as well as GC faculty and administrative personnel.

In the past, we have advocated for transparency and representation in the decision-making process for IT resources and expenditures, and specifically expenditures funded by the Student Technology Fee (STF), which is paid for by enrolled students every semester. During the 2017-2018 academic year, each enrolled student paid a Student Tech Fee of \$125 or \$62.50, for full-time or part-time status, respectively. Student representatives have been serving in the STF Committee, a body of student and IT Services and Library personnel that recommends to the President a budget for the expenditures of Student Technology Fees. In our capacity, we have regularly identified students' technology needs and made appropriate recommendations in order to meet those needs, such as the implementation of book scanners and printing services in the Library. We believe that in order to continue to serve the interests of all students, the highest governing offices of the Graduate Center must reconsider changes to several key elements of IT Services.

First, as student representatives in the STF Committee, we have observed that the STF is used as the primary, rather than supplementary, source of funding to meet all library and technology needs; it is not enough. Rather than integrating students' baseline resources into the IT Services budget, all basic expenses related to students, such as computers, laptops, printers, scanners, as well as library subscriptions to academic journals, material and electronic books, IT resources for students with disabilities and in satellite programs, and even ETI Chargebacks to CUNY Central are expected to be funded by STF. In 2018, STF funds are insufficient to properly replace all computers being retired from the Library, for example, or meet basic technology needs of students in satellite programs housed in other CUNY campuses. As student representatives, we believe that a baseline of technology resources should be covered by the overall IT Services budget, rather than pushing all basic

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expenses onto students under the STF budget. No other GC budget or service functions in that way (for example the Student Activity Fee is not the sole source of funding for all student services).

Secondly, we find it imperative to create greater transparency around the decision-making process of the IT Services Budget, in addition to the Student Tech Fee budget. While student representatives are currently involved in the STF Committee, we would be able to make stronger and more strategic budgetary recommendations to meet students' technology needs both at the Graduate Center and satellite programs if we had greater understanding of the overall IT Services budget, as well as internal assessments and GC-wide inventory reports conducted by IT Services. IT Services should provide a basic breakdown of fiscal year projected sources of revenue and spending estimates, as well as inventory reports. Also, the IT Services budget is not reviewed or seen by the Provost's Office; it goes directly to the President without any review or input by students or faculty and it is unclear why it does not meet technology needs such as library computers, scanners, or new equipment. We believe that in order to properly serve the technology needs of students, the IT Services budget and IT Services reports need to be among the items reviewed by the Budget Advisory Committee and available to the STF Committee.

Lastly, we believe other GC funding sources should be directed to IT Services in order to fund student needs, such as capital projects. While capital projects are currently funding new computer replacements for faculty and staff, as well as teaching equipment in GC classrooms, capital projects or other sources of funding have not been used to fund student-specific needs. A recent survey conducted by the DSC in the Spring of 2018 shows that certain technologies are of utmost importance to students, including functioning printers, a proper remote computing system which allows access to GC software, additional program-specific software, more scanners, laptops for loan, on-site computers, and an IT Helpdesk that can provide face-to-face interaction with IT support staff. The DSC urges IT Services and the GC administration to use other sources of funding, such as capital projects or private donorships, in order to support student technology and software needs.

We thank you in advance for your timely response to this letter.

Regards,

Steering Committee of the Doctoral and Students' Council

Effectively Sign by the Steering Committee of the DSC on November 2, 2018

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