

BOARD OF REGENTS BRIEFING PAPER

#1 Agenda Item Title: HANDBOOK REVISION: ACCESS RATIO FOR GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT FEE-BASED FINANCIAL AID

2. BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

Access fees are intended to expand “access” to higher education, including graduate studies, to a wider range of students, including those from diverse and underrepresented groups. This is clearly a desired goal for graduate/professional student recruitment and retention. Over time, the ratio of access fees has been routinely reviewed and adjusted as needed. In the past the Access Fee distribution ratio was 80:20 (80 need based and 20 non-need); currently it is 90:10 (need to non-need) for both undergraduates and graduate students.

Recent data indicate that there is \$3,133,572 of unmet need among UNLV graduate students who submit FAFSA forms; UNR’s graduate unmet need is \$1,958(s; U)5(2(5,(0 neF8N.1a)-2(a)6(t8Pp)w(LV)a(yTta)-1(1(enm)TjEndoN5(m FAFSA is used as a standard for financial need. To identify need for graduate students, the FAFSA presents two challenges. First, the priority deadline for filing the FAFSA form is February 1 and only 20% of the graduate programs at UNR and 34% of those at UNLV have their admission deadlines on or before Feb 1. Consequently, the majority of admission decisions at the graduate level take place after the priority filing date, thus funds could be expended prior to the graduate admission deadline. Secondly, because many graduate programs offer graduate assistantships as part of their admissions, only 25% (UNLV) and 28% (UNR) of enrolled graduate/professional students complete the FAFSA form (this compares to 40% [UNLV] and 41% [UNR] of undergraduate students).

If the ratio of need vs. non-need were adjusted, however, it would be a significant benefit for both UNR and UNLV to be able to use a greater portion of the Access dollars for non-need based scholarships as part of the effort to recruit and retain the highest quality graduate students. In comparison to undergraduate students, fewer scholarships are available for graduate and professional students. For UNR undergraduates \$11,016,811 is available for scholarships, compared to \$1,454,709 for graduate/professional scholarships. For UNLV there is \$17,966,501 in scholarships for undergraduates compared to \$539,346 for graduate students. Changing the allocation guidelines for Graduate Access Fees by altering the need-based to non-need based distribution ratio (from 90:10 to 50:50, a minimum of 50% need-based and up to 50% non-need based) would allow these dollars to be used to recruit graduate students who may not have filed a FAFSA, even if they have need.

This flexibility in awarding Access dollars to graduate students is needed and would be particularly helpful as a recruitment incentive in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. At the same time, the ratio still awards a significant amount of need based scholarships (a minimum of 50% of all graduate access fees). In cons

4. IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

- Fee and tuition increases for graduate students have risen at a greater rate than that of undergraduate students; graduate and professional students also suffer greater opportunity costs (lost wages/salaries) for their time in graduate or professional school than undergraduates.
- The FAFSA priority deadline which establishes financial need precedes the majority of admission decisions at the graduate level. In order to provide access to education for graduate/professional students who may not complete the FAFSA, who may do so late, or who may only be recruited on

POLICY PROPOSAL
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 18, SECTION 18
Student Access

Additions appear in *boldface italics*

[5]7. Nothing in this Section precludes an institution from allocating additional funds for general scholarship purposes. Any such additional allocations are not subject to the student access distribution established in this section.