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Expression of concerns from social science graduate students

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The UMKC Students of the Social Science Consortium (S3C, a UMKC student organization) are drafting an "expression of concern" letter regarding the impact of the University's budget cuts on graduate education. S3C officers held several meetings in the last few weeks and called for an urgent S3C meeting on Sunday, April 28. More than 200 graduate students in the social sciences were notified. About 50 of them came to the meeting, and many others showed great support (through e-mails and phone calls) to the S3C initiative.

UMKC is confronting a profound budget crisis that will very soon negatively affect all social science departments. In particular, support for graduate students is gravely threatened, including stipends, funding for research and opportunities to teach.

After discussions with various departmental faculty and chairs, we have been told that numerous GTA positions are expected to be eliminated - all of them for some departments, many summer school courses will have to be eliminated, and part-time faculty positions for next fall expected to be reduced. This is in addition to losing funds for travel and even basic office supplies.

Although the real nature of this budget crisis is a fact, the actual extent of the mandated cuts are not yet known, as the departments have been getting confusing and conflicting updates on their specific budget situation. Lately, often during the same week, they will be told that funding is assured for item "x" only to be told a few days later that such promised funding has been withdrawn. Budget planning meetings have been repeatedly postponed. Nothing specific is yet known, except that the cuts to come will be real and deep.

In addition, whenever the central administration speaks of UMKC's new "Blueprint" and the priority areas for future resource commitment and development, the social sciences are never mentioned. Even the School of Graduate Studies, which in the past has sometimes been able to provide some extra funds for social science department projects, has no funds available in this crisis.

This all comes at a time when the College of Arts and Sciences is without a sitting, full dean in place to defend it and compete for resources with the other 12 colleges and professional schools. The success of our graduate education depends upon STRONG departments with the resources to fully participate. Otherwise, without adequate resources, there is little sustaining incentive for them to involve themselves with graduate students. As one former department chair told us, the

new incentives would favor reducing commitments to graduate education and instead focusing on the greater number of undergraduate credit hours that can be produced.

Each of us has a real stake in the outcome of the current budget negotiations at UMKC. We have committed significant time and resources to our graduate education. We are full members of the UMKC community. This is the real world and we are adults in it. There is no reason why we should just sit on our hands and fail to speak up on our own behalf and on the behalf of the departments that attempt to support us. Not to do so would be unreasonable.

Therefore, S3C is drafting an "expression of concern" to be signed by the graduate students and recent graduates of the social science departments at UMKC. S3C plans to present this statement to the central administration sometime during finals week. S3C hopes to help the departments of the social sciences to hold on to as much of their current funding and support as they possibly can, and to again ask for continued funding for the Social Science Consortium.

If you would like to support S3C's initiative, and to have more info about S3C's "expression of concern," visit S3C's website: <http://www.umkc.edu/s3c> or call 235-5648.
