

MPP Student Responses to Increasing PDST Fees Exit Surveys, 2022-2023

January 3, 2024

Sam Newman, Student Affairs Advocate

Introduction

The report is a summary of responses from a question about raising PDST fees found on the MPP exit survey. This question was asked in 2022 and 2023 and is taken by second year MPP students near their graduation. The report was commissioned [REDACTED]

Overview

- 166 alumni graduating between 2022-2023 completed an exit survey regarding their MPP experiences at [REDACTED]
- Students completed the survey on a Google form and had about 6 weeks to complete the survey. A reminder notice was sent at least twice for both years.

Key Findings

- Twice as many students were against increasing PDST fees (41) compared to those that supported an increase (21).
- Most students who did not support an increase voiced that students, especially low-income, shouldn't have to pay more money for tuition.
- If fees were to increase, students want more financial and career resources.

Recommendations

- If PDST fees increase, money should be continued to be returned to students in various forms (career services, funding, etc.)
- Continue providing more transparency on PDST spending (where it spent and how much)

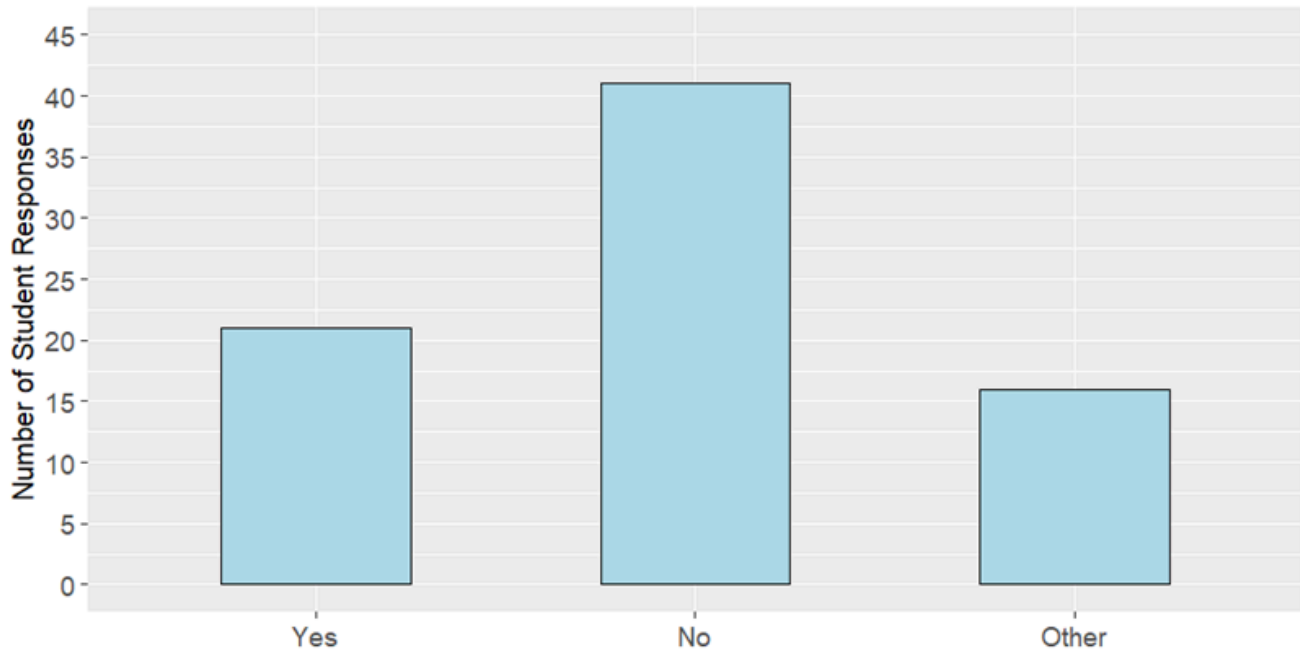
Survey Question

(PDST) is an additional mandatory tuition assessed to students enrolled in designated graduate professional degree programs including the Master of Public Policy (MPP). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PDST fees will increase by five percent each year to address student financial need and School and Department operations. You have the option to provide input about PDST increase and how this could affect students in the MPP program.

PDST Fees

Student Responses to Increasing PDST Fees
(2022-2023)



n= 78 student responses

Summary of Results and Themes

Yes (21 mentions)

8 people responded with short variations of "Yes" and weren't placed in a thematic category.

- Increasing PDST fees will alleviate student's financial hardship (7 mentions)
- The services the PDST provide are helpful (2 mentions)
- Other: Yes (4 mentions)

No (41 mentions)

6 people responded with short variations of "No" and weren't placed in a thematic category.

- Students, especially low-income, shouldn't have to pay more (19 mentions)
- Higher PDST fees will discourage students from attending [REDACTED] (7 mentions)
- Students don't feel the value of PDSTs (7 mentions)
- Other: No (2 mentions)

Other (16 mentions)

- If fees increase, students should have more financial and career resources (6 mentions)
- More transparency on how PDST funds are used (4 mentions)
- PDSTs should be covered by TAs, GSR, and fellowships (3 mentions)
- Miscellaneous (3 mentions)

PDST Fees

Quotes by Themes

All quotes are taken directly from student responses.

Yes (21 mentions)

8 people responded with short variations of "Yes" and weren't placed in a thematic category.

Increasing PDST fees will alleviate student's financial hardship (7 mentions)

- I'm for the increase because I want people to get the most out of their education, but I think financial need should be the priority. The financial need aspect addresses the financial barriers (to a degree) to an education, as well as helping financially insecure students by giving them more leniency with their personal budget. This is very important since the cost of living in LA is really high and that was before inflation. The extra money also helps students when they run into unexpected events during the course of their education (as we have witnessed throughout the pandemic).
- I am in support of this action and believe that it expresses concerns, recognition, and support for students with financial hardship.
- This would help students to be more focused on their classes rather than worrying about financial debt or working jobs while obtaining a degree.
- It will release my financial distress.
- I like that it goes to undocumented students to cover their fees completely.
- This could help students pay for more emergency needs in the future.
- I think of it as a progressive tax, think it makes sense.

The services the PDST provide are helpful (2 mentions)

- The PDST grant was very helpful for the DC tour and the APP fund, so I am ok with raising the price.
- I agree with increasing the PDST. Funds for professional development and supplies, attending professional events, offset educational barriers, commuter funds.

Other: Yes (4 mentions)

- 5% is not enough.
- I think increasing the fees is understandable and reasonable as long as the usage of those fees is publicly available
- I am glad I received a fellowship based on the PDST. I think it encourages class (SES) diversity.
- I think an increase of 5% is too much. I think it's fair that the fees go back to the school only if it is not used to increase staff and faculty and administrative salaries. Maybe a 3% increase per year would help students who are already in a lot of debt.

No (41 mentions)

6 people responded with short variations of "No" and weren't placed in a thematic category.

Students, especially low-income, shouldn't have to pay more (19 mentions)

- [REDACTED] has enough money. PDST tuition should only be expected from those who can afford it or be waived for low income and subsidized at a scale. It creates further barriers for zero gen and first-gen to low-income and black/brown/ethnic folks.

PDST Fees

- A PDST increase would impact the poorest students more than the wealthier ones. It would create an undue burden on students that aren't in a position to take on more loans as well as those who are working themselves through graduate school. The existence of such a fee structure is confounding, not only because [REDACTED] is a multi-billion-dollar institution, but also because [REDACTED] receives very generous endowments and grants that align with its position as a top tier program. If students were able to truly feel the effects of the PDST increase - as in, if students were able to actually know where this money was going and that it benefited them more than harmed them financially - then maybe I wouldn't be so opposed to it.
- This would provide challenges for MPP students disproportionately, as those experiencing more disparities financially would incur the greatest costs, even despite the 1/3 allocation back in terms of a reduction of those fees. What still stands is that the cost increase would prompt financially adverse grad students to struggle and be worse off financially, prompting greater debt burdens and/or longer time spent working to incur those costs, thereby offsetting time availability and allocation towards their education
- While having additional funds is helpful to support the three areas mentioned, I don't agree with having students bear the burden of a yearly 5% increase. COVID has been rough, and its impact will continue to unravel as we move forward with time. The students coming may have likely faced severe financial hardship due to COVID. It doesn't seem right to me to have them pay PDST costs.
- Do not increase. take out of dean's salary.
- This additional tuition should fully be covered by a proportional increase in financial aid for students that demonstrate financial need.
- This would provide challenges for MPP students disproportionately, as those experiencing more disparities financially would incur the greatest costs, even despite the 1/3 allocation back in terms of a reduction of those fees. What still stands is that the cost increase would prompt financially adverse grad students to struggle and be worse off financially, prompting greater debt burdens and/or longer time spent working to incur those costs, thereby offsetting time availability and allocation towards their education
- The PDST increase should be capped and on campus jobs with fee remission should include PDST fees. The PDST fees are the greatest contributor to my student debt and students should have different methods for lowering the cost through on-campus employment and contributions to the [REDACTED] School. In many ways, we pay our own salaries when we have high PDST fees, so these costs should be steadily offloaded to other funding sources and the cost of an education at [REDACTED] should be as low as possible.
- The program already costs a lot, additional costs should not be passed onto the students.
- Any increase in PDST fees will cause greater financial hardship to [REDACTED] students. Most students' PDST grant did not cover a significant amount of the PDST fee. Any further increase in the PDST fee should fully go back to students in the form of financial aid and not the [REDACTED] School or MPP Program.
- An increase might make it more difficult for students who are already struggling to afford tuition and fees.
- I think PDST, for how helpful it is (5 on a 10 pt scale) is an expense that should not come out of students' pockets. PDST is incredibly helpful and funds things like career counseling that are very helpful, but we should not have to bear the full increasing cost of it.
- A 5% increase yearly is high and hurts people without adequate financial support. Consider ways to reduce fees in future years.
- I think that the concept of the PDST grant is great! However, this really impacts students who are already unable to pay for tuition and for essentials. Although I do understand that the PDST is distributed to students as a grant or award, I think it may be best for students to keep the money that they already have to pay for the PDST.
- I don't think that increase should negatively affect low-income students
- It's important to take into account the financial burden that this increase may impose on students, particularly those who are already struggling to cover their tuition costs.

PDST Fees

- If PDST increases are not distributed equitably to the respective buckets, students with greatest financial hardship may not reap the same benefits of this redistribution. There should be consideration how changes in dual-degree enrollment affects support for ██████ school in general vs department of public policy.
- Increasing PDST fees should not be taken lightly - graduate education is already expensive and inaccessible to so many just due to cost (which reproduces the socioeconomic inequalities in our field and in our society)
- It was difficult to pay the additional fees even though I was working for the UC because they are not remitted. Need to ensure more equitable distribution. It was disappointing that not all 2nd years that applied for APPAM conference funding were included.

Higher PDST fees will discourage students from attending ██████ (7 mentions)

- I was able to complete this program without additional debt which was invaluable to me. If I had to accrue more debt for this program, I'm not sure I would have attended grad school at all. I think you will lose prospective students if you increase prices too much. I chose ██████ over USC for affordability.
- The PDST money clearly supports essential functions for the ██████ School and the Department of Public Policy, but the cost of this degree discourages people who otherwise would be good MPP candidates from applying in the first place and is a burden on MPP students who are not independently wealthy. Ideally the State of California would invest more in the UC system so that tuition increases (normal and PDST) could be avoided.
- Fees should not increase given that it could disproportionately affect low-income students and deter them from pursuing an advanced degree to high tuition costs on top of high housing, transportation, and food costs.
- Raising fees raises barriers to entry.
- The increase could deter students from pursuing their master's at ██████ and cause financial hardship for disadvantaged students.
- Increase of PDST fees will deter amazing prospective students from enrolling at ██████.
- It's not good because the degree is getting more expensive as it decreases its appeal and closes its doors to people of disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Students don't feel the value of PDSTs (7 mentions)

- I think that there should not be an increase but instead there should be an assessment of how those funds are being utilized for students' benefits.
- I feel like I had no sense of how paying an extra several thousand dollars a quarter contributed at all towards my education. It just felt like an added fee without any purpose, contributing to resentment towards ██████. I would, at the very least, suggest better publicizing where these funds go and how they improve the ██████ experience.
- I'm not sure what I received or benefitted from the PDST personally.
- The PDST is the reason I have student loan debt. It is cruel to keep raising this cost when it is not covered by TA/GSR positions, it is an extremely high cost for little benefit.
- Please do not increase it, it is already way too high, and I do not feel like this ends up benefiting students at all
- I did not know that two thirds of the tuition go to the ██████ School. Honestly, I am not sure if I ultimately benefitted it from the ██████ School.
- If students are not able to directly and quickly benefit from where the money is being used, then yes it does create financial barriers for students who really want to pursue higher education. A detailed breakdown should be shown to students, and students should have input on how the funds should be used

PDST Fees

Other: No (2 mentions)

- I do think there should be more opportunities to gather in community with fellow MPP students, but the PDST was costly and was difficult for me to find every quarter.
- While I oppose the PDST increase, it would be nice to see more of this money go towards financial aid.

Other (16 mentions)

If fees increase, students should have more financial and career resources (6 mentions)

- If PDST fees are set to increase, then students should be provided with more services and resources to match the increase in the fees they must pay. This must be assessed on an annual basis to ensure that the resources provided by the Department are adequately matched to the increased cost burden on students.
- I know that the MURP helps their undocumented students with the entirety of the PDST fees. This is of course a huge help. I would like to see something like this [REDACTED] wide. Especially because incoming undocumented students are more likely to not have DACA and thus not have work authorization. That means TAs, GSR positions, & some fellowships may not be available to them.
- If the department is going to keep increasing the PDST fee, they should also increase the resources available to us. More career focus workshops, networking events, panels, etc.
- More assistance with finding TAs would be a way to mitigate the increases
- I hope the increase is used to support students' career-wise by having more diverse employees at the career fair.
- To have events/conferences/opportunities where we can see PDST fees being utilized more so.

More transparency on how PDST funds are used (4 mentions)

- There should be more transparency for students who are applying to [REDACTED] and once admitted, as to how this works and what they can expect depending on their general income. This would reduce anxiety and help students understand that this might not be as expensive as they think going in.
- 5% feels like a steep annual increase. I feel like there's a lack of transparency in differences between how the money comes back to you when you're a first vs. second year. I didn't realize that as a second year, I'd be getting a smaller department fellowship amount.
- Maybe Luskin School could be more transparent in how the money is used.
- I do not think the increase should be too high. If it is increasing by a certain percentage each year, I would make this transparent as well as how the funds are distributed.

PDSTs should be covered by TAs, GSRs, and fellowship remittances (3 mentions)

- PDST is incongruent with student labor politics at [REDACTED]. Tuition remediation should include PDST funds as well, especially if students are a TA/GSR at the [REDACTED] School. We study politics and loopholes and ways opposition go about getting past legislation. The labor contracts for students generally are geared towards the broader student population and limit the increases of tuition for all students and ensure tuition remediation for work at a TA/GSR is equally compensatory and increases with the rise of tuition. These general concerns are addressed by the labor bodies, but the Professional fees are less visible/regulated. The spirit of the labor contracts wants to help prevent unchecked increases in tuition. We are students not just "professionals", we deserve the same rights to fee/tuition remediation as other students. The PDST increases should not be occurring until they address this inequity, especially as often times the students most in need of this relief are pursuing on campus work in addition to studying for their professional degree.
- The PDST should be covered by TAs

PDST Fees

- The PDST (should there be an increase) should consider the student's income level and be adjusted so students can have more financial sustainability. Having additional funding for students who may experience hardships due to the PDST increase should be available. PDST increase can impact students' ability to succeed in school by taking on additional working shifts and create unhealthy living styles (such as skipping meals or opting for non-nutritious diets to save on costs).

Miscellaneous (3 mentions)

- Raise by a lower amount
- I appreciate that 1/3 of this goes toward student financial aid, but why not lower the cost and direct funds solely to [REDACTED] and the Dept. of Public Policy instead? I also know that this is an important source of funding to keep essential staff in the Dept. of Public Policy who were integral to my experience at [REDACTED].
- Again, I don't know how things work internally, but am wondering if it may be possible for the school or the department to seek donor money or apply for external grants to (fully or partially) cover costs that the PDST funds? That's just a thought.