

Policy Consultation and Approval Process

Summary of Comments Received during the Formal Review Phase

Graduate Assistantships

A. Individual Comments

- Graduate students are criminally underpaid. We worry that this reflects a general deficiency in MNSU's general stance towards social equity. You want us to believe that we are working for and should eventually donate and contribute towards MNSU as alumni, but the current pay issues reveal a striking indifference from the administration towards the people who actually keep the University functioning. This is bad for undergrads, bad for the faculty who supervise graduate assistants, and bad for MNSU as an institution. There is no gesture that will alleviate these issues other than an increased rate of pay.
- I think we need to have a policy of having full waivers for students who are hired as replacement GA after the due dates. I went through the same situation as I was hired after the due date and was told that I didn't qualify for a tuition waiver. However, the amount of work the Graduate student that have to put into work is the same whether he/she is hired before or after the due date. Moreover, the one who gets replaced their all waivers are taken off after the due date then there shouldn't be a problem adding the waiver after.
- Hi, I am a Graduate Assistant at MNSU since 2 semesters, being an international student, I want to let you guys know the fact of our payment which is less and as equal to those students who are working on campus and earning the same amount. The salary that we get is used for our apartment rent, utilities, groceries and at the end of month just 100 dollar is left in the account and that too after saving will be utilized to pay some pending student fees. I really feel stressed that what I am earning, I cannot save it. This is a reality of what I am facing each month, there are no savings for the month of break when we get no payment for example, the month of December when university was closed, it was difficult month for me as I saved nothing from my job as a graduate assistant and my family is not in a position to support me as they have bank loans to pay that they took for my Education and sending me here to US. I suffered a lot in the month of December and feeling scared to think about how I am going to manage after Spring semester. Hope someone can understand and do some justice to it. Apologies if I wrote something against the rules of university. Thank you that I can share my feelings with someone who can bring change.

- "The current rate of \$5,000 per semester is nowhere near sufficient for graduate assistants. This is especially problematic for international students, who are unable to secure employment in any other capacity.

As a priority, MNSU should investigate solutions to support international student graduate assistants, whether that's finding a cheaper health insurance package, offering a 40-hr-per-week higher stipend option for international students, or engaging with local politicians to work out a way for international students to take on a second job, without violating the terms of their visa.

The international student community is a major contributor to the diversity of MNSU. Without these students, our learning environment would be very different. It's frankly disgusting to see international graduate students struggling to pay rent or buy fresh vegetables, who would happily work more hours, but can't. "

- In regard to the multiple references of \$5,000 being a minimum stipend amount, please consider adding language to be more explicit as it pertains to external funding sources and the ability to offer an increased stipend amount.
- "I would like the committee to consider that the current stipend package for graduate assistantships is not at all competitive. Just looking at the University of Minnesota, the college's main competitor for students in the state, the benefits and wages are significantly higher. Their package for a master's student working 20 hours/week is a tuition waiver for 9 credits a semester and pay of at least \$20.75/hour. This also included possible health insurance benefits. Meanwhile, a similar package at our school pays around \$15 an hour with no health benefits.

This disparity remains true even when considering differences in cost of living. Minneapolis is 3% higher than the national average for cost of living, whereas we are 8% below it. Even if you adjust the University of Minnesota's wages to be 11% lower to account for this, we should be receiving at least \$18.47 an hour for things to remain competitive. This difference would still not account for the difference in monetary value of the tuition waivers, the difference in health insurance benefits, or the \$400+ we must pay in student fees every semester.

I also believe that increasing pay would eventually be cost beneficial to the university. If you are able to bring in more graduate assistants to teach labs, you will not have to hire as many adjuncts. At least in my department, we have more labs to be taught than we have teaching assistants. I have even worked with tenured professors putting in their valuable time teaching introductory level labs instead of focusing on their research. Often times they are asked to fill these positions without additional compensation. This is an easily fixable problem. Better compensation will bring in more teacher assistants.

I enjoy working for this school but have become frustrated with how difficult it is to get by as an adult living on this as a salary. I and multiple of my peers are on

food assistance. Some of my peers are uninsured or underinsured. If you want to bring in quality candidates for these positions, improving the quality of education at this school, please reconsider the compensation you provide to graduate students."

- The university needs to increase the current stipend package for graduate assistantships. This increase should be linked to inflation/regular increases. It currently is not equitable. Students without outside financial security are not able to succeed as students. If you want to bring up student success, improving the quality of education at this school, please reconsider the compensation you provide to graduate students.
- In regard to the multiple references of \$5,000 being a minimum stipend amount, please consider adding language to be more explicit as it pertains to external funding sources and the ability to offer an increased stipend amount.
- I would like the school to look to increase the stipend paid to Graduate and Teaching assistants. The cost of living has gone up in the last couple of years and the current stipend is lower than some other schools. It would also encourage more TAs to apply for the position which would reduce the load on the professors in the department.
- "The University does not fully financially support its graduate students, and more specifically, all the students that are admitted. I have been a graduate student since Fall 2020, and for almost every semester during my time at the University, I have been unsure whether or not I would have financial support in the form of a graduate assistantship.

I initially was admitted to my program under the impression that it was custom for every student admitted to receive a 20-hour assignment that would cover tuition. However, before my second semester, I was informed I had only been awarded a 10-hour assignment and had to search for another 10-hour assignment to make up the difference. This has happened at least twice since then because my department does not receive the funding it needs to take full care of all its graduate students while they complete their degrees (which usually takes at least three years).

My department is relatively small, with only four active graduate students in my cohort. However, I know that more were admitted at the same time as me but chose other schools because they were offered more money, health care, or an assistantship at all. My department was not able to offer every candidate an assistant position, and if a position was offered, it was often half an assistantship that is only for 10 hours a week and covers half of the tuition. This places unnecessary stress on the students and the professors because students either have to take out loans, search for other assistantships, or look off campus for jobs, which are not required to accommodate university schedules. Professors

must then use their valuable time picking up the slack when they could be spending their time on research or developing their class. Also, working 10 hours a week and paying tuition out of pocket is not really an option for most students, especially considering the wages are \$15/hour. Either option is not sustainable, can lead to permanent financial debt with students, and burnout among professors.

One of the concerns I have heard regarding how much money each department receives for assistantships the size of the department. The amount rewarded is correlated to the amount of students, with more money going to programs that admit more students. However, this often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy where departments are not able to attract students because they either cannot offer an assistantship, or the assistantships are too small, and the students go elsewhere. The funding is then cut because there are not enough students in the program. And the cycle continues. In this case, eventually the only students who will be able to attend the university are students from wealthy backgrounds, which often excludes any first-generation or non-white students. The reverse is also true. If more money is given to departments to fund their students, they are able to attract more students, expand the programs and departments, and continue to bring in more students, and therefore revenue.

I hope that as you consider funding for this review, you consider how equitable it is to not fully-fund your students.

Similarly, please consider increasing the amount each student receives in general. Even with a 20-hour position, many students rely on loans and food stamps to get by. I personally have two roommates and would not be able to afford living alone in Mankato. One of my roommates, who is also a graduate student and has a full assistantship, does rely on food stamps. This is shameful when other universities offer more money per hour AND healthcare for their graduates. This also leads to more potential students choosing to attend a different university, and thus taking potential tuition money elsewhere."

- Please consider raising the stipend amount for GA/TA/RAs to at least \$15,000 per academic year. Compared to other universities, Minnesota State University Mankato does not compensate graduate assistantships competitively, nor are the current stipend amounts adequate to cover the basic costs of living. As someone who has completed graduate work while working full-time and part-time, I have witnessed firsthand how much more academically engaged students are allowed to be when their studies are their main focus in life. Presently, graduate students at Minnesota State University Mankato are forced to either work full-time and allow their academic engagement to take a back seat or sacrifice their financial, physical, and mental well-being in the name of academia. Allow graduate students to thrive at this university - raise the stipend amount.

- As mentioned previously, working as a TA should not require another outside job or SNAP... I am getting pressured to finish my degree early due to financial strain on my fiancé and i. This isn't acceptable.
- Please consider reevaluating the salary of Graduate Teaching Assistants. I have been a grad TA for three years. I take great pride in my teaching, but I am exhausted. In addition to being a full-time master's student and a TA, I work two additional jobs to stay afloat. During my time working at MNSU, I have had my utilities shut off at different times, and my car was repossessed because I could not make the payments. I do not have health insurance. When new students arrive for the master's programs, they always inquire about how we "live on this wage." The sad truth is: not well. Please consider the positive impact increased salary would have for TAs and the University's reputation within these higher learning degree programs.
- Increasing the stipend pay for graduate assistantships from \$10,000 a year to \$12,000 a year. With inflation and the tax that is almost 20% on my paychecks I am unable to support myself off of this money and have had to take out loans on top of this. This is very stressful for me and either reducing the tax or increasing the pay would be very helpful. Thank you for your consideration.
- "I am writing to provide feedback regarding the section below in the current Graduate Assistantship policy. These comments were not addressed in the formal review proposal

Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Resolution Minnesota State University, Mankato adheres to the long-standing resolution established by the Council of Graduate Schools which states that a student does not have to commit to an assistantship offer prior to April 15th. The Council of Graduate Schools resolution is posted on the Council of Graduate Schools Website. In instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15th, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment up to and through April 15th. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15th, commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which the commitment has been made. Similarly, an offer by an institution after April 15th is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer

While I understand the original intent of this resolution, assistantship offerings and needs have changed quite a bit since the 1960s. (In a quick google search, The April 15 Resolution was developed by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the 1960s to protect both the institutions that offer financial support to admitted students and the prospective students who receive them.)

This current rule, even before COVID-19, makes it challenging to hire the most qualified candidates or have qualified candidates remaining in the pool after April 15. Let me provide two different contexts that speak to the challenges with this current practice.

First, when the April 15 date was initiated, many graduate academic programs on our campus made academic program offers in March and April. Now, largely because of the internet and a more global institutional presence, many graduate academic application deadlines are now in January and February. As a result (good or bad) potential graduate students want to know their assistantship status for the following year sooner than later before making an academic commitment.

Second, in our department we hire several graduate assistants each year. Under this policy, when a student inquires how long they have to accept an offer, we have to tell them April 15. In some cases, that results in the individual holding off until April 15 to make a decision for a variety of reasons. When they hold on to an offer until April 15th approaches, then decline the offer, we have either lost most or all of our strong graduate assistantship candidates who have moved on and accepted positions elsewhere. This results in us having to either hire a less skilled individual or not fill the position....in each case creating more work for union professionals on our campus.

If I understand correctly, continued participation in this resolution was advocated for by staff in the College Student Personnel program. For many years, the CSP application deadline for their program was in April and so the April 15 deadline aligned with their process. Now, for example, the CSP application deadline is January 15.... three months before a person can be required to commit to an assistantship. Simply put that does not make sense given the connectivity of our field. It also does not align with a post COVID-19 world of job seekers and add one more barrier to filling graduate assistantships with qualified candidates.

I have included a recent resolution related to the April 15 deadline. I would propose that our campus discontinues being a signatory to the April 15 resolution and that each department can determine their own reasonable deadline for a candidate to accept a position offer. Many colleges and Universities in the Minnesota State system are not signatories (see attachment of current schools) and do not participate in this practice."

B. Group Comments (Note: some comments may also have been submitted as individual comments above)