

## Policy Consultation and Approval Process

### Summary of Comments Received during the Informal Review Phase

## **Graduate Assistantships**

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### A. Individual Comments

- The amount we offer for stipends is horrendously low. We are 2-3x lower than some of our regional counterparts not in the MinnState system. And many of those offer health insurance. We currently have students visiting local food shelf or other donation centers just to get by. And some of them are struggling both financially and in their physical/mental health because they are not able to afford treatment for medical issues they are dealing with. WE MUST DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS! We should be offering the equivalent to what is offered by peer-institutions like UM-Duluth. We are unable to compete in recruiting high-quality students and we are unable to support our students adequately. Sorry for the frankness of this comment, but it is something that really needs to be said. Thanks.
- GA positions should pay up to 10 credits a semester instead of 9.
- In the current year we have made exceptions to the statements that assistantship tuition waivers do not cover undergraduate credits. If future exceptions/appeals are going to be considered, a statement regarding the process for appeals should be added so that students are given equal opportunity to appeal for this.
- 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 master's student working 20 hours/week is a tuition waver 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 OR the difference in health insurance benefits.

I also believe that increasing pay would be cost beneficial for the college. 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 work with a professor who is currently putting in his valuable time teaching introductory level labs instead of focusing on research. This is not a position he volunteered for, but one he was asked to fill without additional compensation because of a shortage in graduate assistants to fill it.

This is a fixable problem.

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.

- As a Graduate Assistant (GA), the \$10,000 annual stipend does not cover my basic living expenses. On top of an already unlivable stipend, GA's have to pay around \$500 a semester for student fees, which is a large portion of our wages that should be allocated for essential human needs including shelter, food, water, and electricity. International GA's are required to pay even higher expenses such as student and insurance fees. I deeply yearn for the committee to take ample time to seriously consider the financial, emotional, physical, occupational, academic, and psychological strain that many GAs endure due to decrepit wages. The stress of inadequate funds to support underlying determinants of health has adverse mental and physical effects to the health of GAs, which is a violation of international human rights, as health is an inclusive, basic, and fundamental human right (World Health Organization, 1966). The Policy Consultation Committee must take action to support the basic needs of their students, mentees and colleagues and provide a livable GA stipend that corresponds to the expenses of today's market. GAs work tirelessly to provide knowledge, labor, support, and care to the university, students, and supporting faculty and therefore deserve to receive wages that cover vital necessities.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter. I look forward to seeing the Policy Consultation Committee take action to adequately support the rights and needs of GAs and simultaneously step closer to the cultivation of an equitable environment within Minnesota State University, Mankato.

World Health Organization. (1966). International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

- Provide an explanation for the line "Graduate assistants may not be employed concurrently as an adjunct faculty member." For example, if a student already holds a master's in English and is seeking a second master's in Sociology, why the limitation to hold an assistantship in Sociology \_and\_ adjunct teach ENG 101?
- The graduates' Assistantship stipend rate for Doctoral/EDD students should be increased from \$12,000 to 20,000/ to attract more qualified students. Additionally, all departments may be asked to adhere to the policy regarding stipend payments under the approved policy. Most departments do not hire EDD/Doctoral students as graduate assistants because they need to pay doctoral rates, which is stark discrimination and a violation of approved policy. Therefore, an amendment may be made to the policy, and the departments may be asked to ensure equal opportunity and stipend payment according to the approved policy. The graduate assistant stipend rate for master students should be increased from \$10,000 to \$15000 and \$12,000 to 20,000/ for doctoral students. Moreover, the university should also cover health insurance for graduate assistants, as most universities do in other states.
- We in the department of Theatre and Dance have been struggling with the fact that this policy singles out our graduate assistants as the only ones on campus who do not get a full tuition waiver for their work. MFA degrees are set at a minimum of 60 credits by our accrediting organizations. If this policy changed to 20 credits per year instead of 18, this would solve that problem.
- For the University to remain competitive and to take into account inflation, the stipend for an assistantship should be increased.
- I am a current graduate assistant here at MNSU and am very pleased to hear this policy is up for review. It is my understanding that the stipend has not changed in a very long time. While I appreciate that the university makes such an effort to cover graduate student tuition and get us on-campus jobs, there are three things I would ask the committee to consider when reevaluating the current policy.

First, according to Zillow, the median rent in Mankato is \$950/month. This means that our annual rent is often more than our stipend before tax.

Second, our income as graduate students technically leave us living under the poverty line. Our stipend before tax is more than \$3500 below the poverty line for a single-person household. We actually make only 56% of the monthly income that qualifies a person living alone for food stamps.

Finally, 20-hrs per week is about all that most graduate students have time to dedicate to a job. The majority of graduate students are not able to give adequate time to their studies and work a second job. For example, in my program, Creative Writing MFA, we are not only assigned homework for our classes, but also a degree-required reading list of at least 40 books. We are also expected to be dedicating time to our efforts to become published writers, which typically involves working on projects that are not for class credit. Being able to do these out-of-class activities enriches our experience and performance in the classroom.

I understand the value of the money that is being put toward our tuition. I do not discount that expense and I am thankful the university pays it. However, I do not believe the trade-off for tuition remission should be poverty. I would rather be here, working on campus, than in another program working off-campus. Our on-campus jobs give us experience in our field and work hours that accommodate our student schedules. But the amount of stress added to my life by the financial constraint of living under the poverty line makes it difficult to give 100% to my studies. It has also stopped me from wanting to complete another degree after my MFA because I know I cannot sustain this lifestyle forever. Being a graduate assistant at MNSU has meant fulfilling work and the chance to work toward expertise in my field, but it has also meant the steady draining of my savings and continued reliance on my parents for monetary support. Considering not everyone has the option of family support and that many of us are aging out of the option to be on our parents' insurance as we complete our degrees, I implore the committee to consider our predicament. We want to give you our best, but our hands are currently tied.

- Summer graduate assistantships should specify hours per week. Additionally, hour-limits per pay period during the summer should be equal to undergrad pay period maximum hour limits (currently the graduate student limits are 28-hours/pay period for grad students' year-around). At the least, graduate students should be able to work 20 hours a week year-around. The current 28-hours/pay period restriction makes paying graduate students a livable-wage VERY difficult and restricts how many hours they can put towards projects despite not having full course loads: <https://admin.mnsu.edu/globalassets/finance-and-administration/business-services/student-payroll/payroll-schedule/minnesota-state-mankato-pay-period-schedule-2022-2023.pdf>

- Graduate Assistantship needs to be increased (or supplemented with housing/meals) to match Equity 2030. GA should also be automatically adjusted each year based on cost-of-living/inflation adjustments.
- The stipend for graduate assistants has not changed in over a decade whereas the cost of living (especially rent) has increased dramatically. If MNSU does not raise the GTA stipend, it will fail to attract quality students for its graduate programs. This is a double loss--for this will also result in a lowering of the quality of instruction in the many introductory courses that are taught by graduate students. Please consider raising the stipend!
- I am writing to provide feedback regarding the section highlighted below in the current Graduate Assistantship policy.

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.

Thank you for considering.

- The graduate assistantship is sorely lacking in payment for graduate students. The first words out of any veteran TA's mouth should NOT be "we get paid so little, that you can immediately apply for food stamps" when talking to incoming TA's. Not only that, i recently discovered that because we get paid and have hours as a TA that are so little, Minnesota has a separate section JUST for graduate students because THEY know that we get paid so little.

In addition, there should be no reason that any graduate student should be working a second job when also working as a TA and doing research with a total amount of almost 30-40 hours or more a week. Due to this, I have seen way too many graduate students take twice as long to finish their Master's because they get burnt out from working and being a Master's student.

I have also seen that compared to certain land grant schools down south, we sorely lack in annual payment where most of them offer \$15,000 a year. Yes, they are land grant schools, but their cost of living is way lower than it is up here.

Lastly, I talked to an old alumnus and found out that the amount that we are getting paid hasn't changed much since the early 2000's. For example, TA's were paid \$9000 a year.... that is only \$1000 less than today. Yet, inflation has exploded since then, and our pay does not compensate for that.

Overall, I think an increase of at most \$15000 annually is sufficient, as I understand the school also deals with other expenses.

- I would like the committee to consider raising the stipend for teaching assistants. For the amount of time and effort we have to put into teaching and grading, we are making well below minimum wage. As a graduate student and a teaching assistant, there is not much time left each week to work any other jobs it's maybe 1-2 short shifts a week at a part time job. We are living on a thin budget to be able to pay a monthly rent. Thank you for your time.
- 1. "The tuition waiver may not be applied to undergraduate credits" - I believe this should be reconsidered. If the undergraduate credit is a requirement for degree completion, the tuition waiver should cover that. I had to take a statistics course for my master's degree since I had not completed statistics in my undergrad.  
  
2. There are several departments on campus that get away with their GAs working over 20 hours a week, even telling them to expect to work over 20 hours during periods of the semester that are deemed "busy". There should be a method of GAs tracking their hours that is viewable to an individual/department outside of their own to hold these units accountable. Perhaps entering them in on timesheets or something similar?
- GAs and TAs are not paid nearly enough. I have to have two jobs to live here, and I still don't even make a full-time job's worth of income. Rent in Mankato is going up, but the stipend and salary has remained the same for YEARS. I should be able to enjoy school and participate in school

activities easily, not have to spend all my extra time working another job to afford to live here. TAs and GAs dedicate so much of themselves to these programs, and the least the school could do was pay a livable wage!

- Increasing the pay for Graduate Assistantships from \$10,000 per year to \$12,000 per year. \$10,000 is not enough money to live off of when 20% of each paycheck gets taxed. I believe that the Graduate Assistantship pay should either not be taxed so heavily or should be increased in amount of pay per year to help support students in graduate programs afford to live as prices keep increasing for rent and groceries. As a graduate student I am contemplating taking out more loans when I had not planned on it and find this to be a difficult time to manage school and my Graduate Assistantship. Thank you for your consideration.
- I would like to present the idea that the minimum stipend of \$5,000 per semester be increased. According to payscale.com, the median rent in Mankato is \$965.08/month which leaves very little to be spent on food, bills, and other necessary expenses, especially with costs on the rise. The argument could be made that students with a Graduate Assistantship could find another job to supplement their income, but the more directions students are pulled to make ends meet financially, the less they will be able to focus on their education and on providing the best work they can for their Graduate Assistantship. Therefore, it would benefit both the students and the university to offer a more livable stipend each semester. Thank you for your consideration.
- As the university fee, health insurance fees and living expenses are so high, the stipend is not enough to fulfil the student's basic needs. So, if the stipend is increased, the students do not have to struggle with financial problems.
- Hi. I would like the University to consider raising the salary of TAs/GAs/RAs. As the society is experiencing, the prices of food, gas, and rent have gone up. My apartment alone has announced that they would raise the rent around 7.9%. Not to mention the health insurance that international students have to pay each year, which always sees a rise each year. As an international student who is willing to sacrifice everything to study in the US, without any financial sponsor and not being able to work off-campus, I would greatly appreciate if the university could adjust the GAs' salary accordingly. This will ease the burden and anxiety about how to survive financially while pursuing my education goal. Thank you.
- Under the Terms and Conditions, first paragraph, there is an addition that states, "At no time may students work more than 20 hours per week." This could be an issue for those students that are receiving Pregnant & Parenting Accommodations through the Title IX Regulations. In order for



the student to fulfill their obligations for the GA position and not lose the tuition waiver and salary, there may be an occasion to "make up" the working hours either before or after the student is absent for the birth/recovery of a child. Would this provision restrict an accommodation that is being made for the student?

Since there review of the policy is only every three years, would it be best not to include the specific dollar amount within the policy for the stipend? As indicated in the current policy under review, the amount per academic year is based off of the 2018-2019 academic year. That was over four years ago. Should there be more flexibility to increase the stipend by indicating that the policy adheres to the current rate and direct the student to review the rate at a particular website. This could adjust for inflation if needed and there would be less specifics that need to be changed within the policy.

Within the Responsibilities and Standards of Performance section, should there be language added that if the student believes the termination was based on discrimination/harassment, then the matter would be referred to the Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX? Or that upon review of the student's appeal, the Dean or VP may consult with other departments on campus as deemed appropriate based on the information provided in the appeal?

Within the Announcement of Opportunities and Application section, Graduate Assistant opportunities are NOW located with the Career Development Center webpage at <https://www.mnsu.edu/university-life/career-development-center/student-and-alumni-career-resources/jobs-and-internships/graduate-assistantship-opportunities/>. They are no longer housed within the Human Resources webpage and the policy should be updated to note the new location.

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

- Graduate student pay needs to increase at the same rate as tuition. Pay and support for doctoral students should be at a higher level
- Graduate students without an assistantship need to be able to work more than 14 hours per week on campus
- International graduate students need to be able to work more than 14 hours per week

