



UNIVERSITY OF
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GRADUATE ASSISTANT ADVISORY COMMITTEE November 30th, 2016

AGENDA

Old Business

- Survey results
- Statements of Mutual Expectation (SMEs)
- Parental Leave Policy
- Missing Policies
 - Bereavement Policy
 - Intellectual Property
 - Worker's Comp

New Business

- Tuition Remission
- Division of Labor Decision on Overtime

OLD BUSINESS

1. Survey Results
Between November 10th and November 18th, we surveyed current graduate employees on a variety of questions related to their employment. We would like to share the results with you, as we shared them with the Graduate School Review Committee, and discuss our findings.
Most specifically, roughly 70% of respondents said their stipends were not enough to support themselves, causing them to depend upon family and second-/third-jobs to support themselves. The need for extra jobs negatively impacts our ability to do high-caliber research, and the poor stipends negatively impact our ability to recruit the best prospective students. This issue has been raised repeatedly by past GAACs--in almost every meeting since the group began in the winter of 2013. Thus we ask:
 - What proactive steps will you take to raise graduate stipends?
2. Statements of Mutual Expectations (SMEs)
Last spring, we were delighted that the Graduate Council chose to recommend SMEs between advisors and graduate student employees who are RAs. At the same time, we were frustrated and disappointed that the graduate council deferred our request to cover TAs and AAs in this recommendation, saying that these employees would be covered down the road.
In our survey, 39.4% of all respondents said they were RAs, while 44.6% of all respondent said they had an SME with their supervisor. These numbers simply cannot coexist with the policy only recommended to cover RAs; and anecdotally, we have heard of departments fighting back against students' attempts to institute SMEs. Our survey

asked whether students felt protected by the Graduate School's recommended employment policies, and while 58.9% answered yes, a shocking 29.3% said no, and 11.9% weren't sure enough to answer. The state of SMEs seems to be an unfortunate example of the confusion and inconsistency of Graduate School employment policies.

- How can you ensure that more RAs are covered, and that departments cease fighting the Graduate School's recommended policy?
- How will you ensure SMEs are expanded to all graduate student employees, including but not limited to TAs and AAs?

3. Parental Leave Policy

Only 8.3% of our survey respondent said they had children, but among that 8.3% there was an unfortunate commonality when we asked for additional comments: the Graduate School's policies do not guarantee a baseline treatment for new parents beyond a six-week period in which they cannot be fired. Phrases in the Graduate School Policy such as "It is important that," "work collegially on further details of the accommodation," "timely review" and "should consult" allow departments to interpret policies on a sliding scale, resulting in inequality between departments when it comes to leave length, pump room access/time, and schedule accommodations (among other issues). This wiggle room results in departments treating new parents extremely well--or extremely poorly. An example: a student who contacted us wrote, "At 6 weeks a baby still needs to be breastfed every 3 hours or so. Most graduate classes last for 2 hours and 45 minutes and the commute to campus and back adds to the time a woman needs to be away from her baby. This time frame makes it impossible to continue to breastfeed and to attend classes without a break for pumping milk. At the same time, the closest lactation rooms to my classes were a ten-minute walk. But walking there, checking out the keys to the room, pumping for 20-30min, bottling the milk, cleaning up and walking back to class would mean missing at least an hour of class each time, which most professors would not care for."

Thus, we ask:

- How can the baseline requirements be expanded to include other aspects of parent accommodation?
- What steps can be taken to strengthen the wording of the current policy?

Furthermore, the baseline that is guaranteed--six weeks "parental accommodation"--falls far short of the twelve weeks required by FMLA. The Graduate School also requires, "If both parents are Graduate Assistants, the six-week accommodation will be divided between them." While we acknowledge that FMLA does not require *paid* leave, and that the Graduate School guarantees that graduate employee parents will "[retain] their full stipends and benefits," we still ask:

- How can we abolish the six-week-split for graduate parent couples?
- How can we extend the guaranteed parental accommodation?

4. Missing employment policies

In reviewing old meeting notes from previous GAAC meetings, it appears that a number of absences in the Graduate School's employment policies have been raised, and not remedied. These include:

- Bereavement Policy: The current leave policy mentions nothing about bereavement. This leaves graduate employees to work something out with their departments — or not. Why is there not an existing policy, and how might we remedy this?

- Intellectual Property: This issue has been raised in GAAC meetings repeatedly. The new Senate policy is near completion and still does not explicitly resolve the conundrum about when GAs are considered students performing academic work, and when they are considered employees working for the institution. We have been told this would be addressed, and it has not been. Where do we go from here?
- Workers Comp: This is uncovered in the Graduate School's assistantship policies. Why is there not an existing policy, and how might we remedy this?

NEW BUSINESS

1. Limitations on tuition remission in offer letters

The Graduate School's assistantship policies acknowledge that, "Some programs, such as the MBA, have higher credit hour rates or flat fee pricing. The tuition remission benefit does not cover the difference, which remains the responsibility of the GA." Unfortunately, the stock language in offer letters does not reflect this; they simply tell students they will receive "tuition remission for up to [] credits per semester" without clarifying that their remission may not cover the whole cost of tuition.

An example: a student contacted us who is enrolled in the ENTS program, which charges \$1037 a credit. This student receives the minimum stipend for her position, \$20,392, working in another department. Yet, because she has to cover the difference for her credits not covered by tuition remission, she earns \$16,530 a year pre-taxes, an amount of money the Graduate School has determined to be below the minimum stipend a department can pay its students.

This generates a few questions from us:

- Can you please require departments to specify that they are remitting tuition credits at the standard credit hour rate--and specifying what that is at the time of the offer letter?
- When departments are employing their own students, why are they not required to remit tuition at the rate charged within their own department?

2. Division Of Labor's new overtime order

The Department of Labor's new overtime rules will take effect on December 1, 2016, and their suggestions for implementation allow room for each campus to decide how they will enforce the new rule. Thus, we want to know:

- How will Maryland enforce the new rule with graduate employees?
- If honoring the rule, how should TAs, who don't ordinarily track hours, ensure they are being justly compensated for working over 20 hours a week?

An example: a graduate employee who contacted us is TAing a class of roughly 115 students with weekly homework to grade. This graduate employee is the only TA. They are spending roughly 25 hours a week just grading, not to mention the class time they are periodically required to attend.