

Spring 2022 Meet & Confer Agenda & Notes

27 April 2022 / GAAC UM-CP Chapter

Participants

Administration: Dean Steve Fetter, Provost Jennifer Rice, Carlo Colella,
GAAC: Alexander Hoyle, Gregory Kramida, Abhishek Ram, Adam Hopper,
Andrew Goffin, Autumn Perkey, Divyansh Agrawal, Erica Henninger,
Melanie Hardy, Samuel DiBella

Minutes taken by Samuel DiBella

1. Meeting procedure **(5 min)**
 - a. All participants free to take minutes for institutional memory and public review
 - b. Any requests for discrete discussion of specific points must be made by the administration in response to each proposed meeting agenda
 - c. Such requests may or may not be granted, while the administration is always free to refuse a response to any inquiry according to M&C rules
Discussion about purpose and how minutes will be approved, before they are posted or publicly shared. **Provost Rice** mentions that minutes are normally subject to review by the entire assembly. GAAC agrees.
2. Review and updates on previous GAAC agenda items **(15 min)**
 - a. Discuss work being done to help graduate workers attain affordable housing
(Not covered in meeting)
 - b. Discuss work being done to alleviate / eliminate any of the fees
(Not covered in meeting)
 - c. Discuss other past issues
Provost Rice: expresses concern that the items on this slide have been previously addressed by UMD policy changes. **Dean Fetter:** points out that grievance policies were developed in concert with GAs. Hoyle says that we do not have systematic offer letters; Dean Fetter disagrees and mentions that SME policy is being looked at by the Elevate project at UMD. **Colella** describes the replacement of several HR systems that will be part of that effort.
3. Stipend Concerns **(35 min total)**
 - a. Discuss what is being accomplished to improve pay of graduate workers **(5 min)**
Hoyle mentions previous administration concerns with methods for making Big 10 stipend comparisons and that GAAC has tried to address those concerns in the following presentation. Hoyle describes the collection of minimum stipend rates, which then are adjusted for healthcare premium and federal and state tax rates and then the MIT cost-of-living figure is subtracted out. Hoyle says that after conducting the calculation UMD has the largest cost-of-living deficit in the Big

10. **Provost Rice** asks whether the MIT calculation is specifically for GAs or what type of worker. Hoyle explains that it is for single adults living in PG county, not specifically GA workers. Provost Rice asks about the appropriateness of the MIT calculation for GAs, and Hoyle responds that it is regularly updated, based on BLS data, and a peer-reviewed paper that could be used for comparison.
- b. Report on updated stipend deficit information across Big Ten (**7 min**)
Hoyle describes how prior to the 2022–23 stipend increases, UMD had the largest MIT cost-of-living deficit in the Big 10; he does acknowledge the work the administration has done to reduce that gap this year and the previous year. Hoyle looks at computer science programs at the Big 10, where UMD is 1 out of 3 programs that don't offer full-year GA support. Hoyle brings up an independent analysis that places UMD atmospheric science program stipends at lowest out of 37 programs. Hoyle argues that cost-of-attendance is an underestimate of GA costs; he says that looking at the comparison of CoA and the MIT CoL, UMD has a \$3,700 deficit. Hoyle asks, "Is the stipend supposed to be a living wage?", "What should be covered by the stipend?", "Why does UMD use a different standard for stipends than other Big 10 universities?"

Provost Rice: responds that not all Big 10 universities do use cost-of-living estimates; **Hoyle** mentions that the Indiana provost has disputed the figure as well. **Provost Rice** agrees that more progress can be made; Rice says the stipend increase in the fall was her top priority as a new provost and it continues to be a high priority, which has received support by the UMD president. Rice mentions that the benchmark to use is contentious in many school contexts and that it requires discussion. Rice says using multiple benchmarks is helpful for conducting those discussions. **Hoyle** agrees but says that having a single target is useful for transparency; he mentions a recent email with Dean Fetter. **Dean Fetter:** disputes the comparison and says that certain calculations shouldn't be included in the MIT cost-of-living number, like cost of education.

- Provost Rice:** says that the cost-of-living index is not a reasonable target, unadjusted or contextualized for UMD. **Hoyle** says we can account for those numbers. **Dean Fetter** says the CoA has to be set in accordance with federal regulations, and that it includes living costs. **Hoyle** says the CoA can be adjusted for individual higher costs; **Dean Fetter** says that CoA is the benchmark already used by the school to determine if students have enough financial resources: for many international students, the GA stipend is their only source of financial support. **Kramida** asks that the meeting move to the next agenda item.
- c. Online resource providing stipend information for every department (**8 min**)
- i. Allows transparency for stipend information across departments
 - ii. Provides incoming graduate students objective information on Assistantships

Kramida: introduces the idea to have an online platform that would provide stipend information, particularly for new GAs; Kramida proposes that this tool would allow easier cross-department comparisons. **Provost Rice** asks for more

explanation on the purpose of the tool. **Kramida** says that new GAs or potential applicants often don't have information about the programs they apply to or are arriving at. He also says this tool could be used so departments could be more aware of other department standards. **Provost Rice** points out that most departments aren't competing for the same students/applicants. **Kramida** says this is part of the decision students make in applying; Provost Rice says it's a useful research question whether new students are making that comparison when making decisions about what academic discipline to pursue. **Hoyle** mentions that decisions about GAs in other departments is a choice that GAs sometimes make, particularly in becoming an instructor of record. **Hardy** says that from her experience in the college of education, she has lost GAs to other departments like computer science or biology. **Dean Fetter** mentions that around 90% of GAs are appointed in their own program. He says this is because GA appointments and support are set at the promise of commission, and those promises are made and kept by the individual departments. **Provost Rice** agrees on that point and says that the point of GAs is to allow GAs to work closely with and learn from faculty in their own field.

- d. Cross-departmental Assistantship online 'Marketplace' (8 min)
(TOPIC NOT COVERED IN MEETING)
 - i. Departments can post Assistantship descriptions with requirements and stipend information
 - ii. Allows existing graduate students to apply
- e. Guaranteed Stipend Support (7 min)
 - i. If not considered compensation for work, financial support should be 100% directly related to a graduate students' studies, which *cannot* benefit the institution or supervisors in any way
 - ii. Any other requirements for a degree constitute a conflict of interest
 - iii. Set a stipend that does not fluctuate for the duration of a fixed term, e.g. 5 years

Kramida mentions previous admin concerns about GAAC data on collective bargaining rights. He says that GAAC has received 1059 new GA signatures from UMCP over the 2021-2022 academic year and overwhelming support from the GSG. He mentions that the GAAC understanding of GA status is fundamentally different from admin's. He says that the framing of GAs as solely being a benefit, rather than a service to the university, to GAs is untrue. **Kramida** says that GAs are vetted by their departments and their experience for their positions. He asks for the admin to provide data about how GAs are positioned solely on their educational status. **Kramida** mentions that GAs should have fixed terms and well-defined graduation requirements, as well as more guaranteed support for GAs. **Kramida** asks whether the administration will consider GAs as workers, not just students. **Dean Fetter** says he doesn't follow the questions. **Kramida** asks Fetter whether he sees GAAC as working adults. **Dean Fetter** agrees, but asks whether this is a good use of this meeting. **Kramida** asks why the administration opposes collective bargaining, then. **Provost Rice** says she disagrees with **Kramida's** framing of division between GAAC and UMD admin, that it is

unhelpful division. She disputes the idea that it would be cheaper for UMD not to have GAs. **Kramida** says Dean Fetter made that point. **Dean Fetter** says he was responding to student testimony, to say that UMD has GAs as part of its educational mission. He says this is different from saying UMD has GAs because they have cheap labor. Hoyle says there is a captive demand problem; he says that at a small liberal arts college GA numbers affect class sizes. **Provost Rice** says that UMD is a research university, so teaching doctoral students is part of that. **Hoyle** says that it has to be the case that GAs provide support to departments. Provost Rice agrees that TA numbers have grown, but that wasn't a business decision and that adjunct teachers could be hired at a much cheaper rate than GAs. **Hoyle** and **Kramida** disagree. Provost Rice says that accounting for the cost of tuition remission, the university could hire adjuncts at a cheaper rate than GAs. **Hoyle** disagrees that tuition remission should be considered; **Provost Rice** disagrees. Rice says if students had to pay their own tuition or healthcare, that is a real cost that changes hands. **Hoyle** says that tuition remission for researching GAs shouldn't be considered; **Dean Fetter** says that research GAs are being supervised by a faculty advisor. There is a discussion about the varying values of educational degrees and obtaining research experience. **Hoyle** says that becoming a GA was a bad financial decision; **Provost Rice** says she made the same decision. Provost Rice says that the benefits of tuition remission, healthcare, etc are part of GA compensation and need to be considered in these meetings. She describes the pushback she received when asking for increased GA stipends, that the benefits for GAs are more compensation than some staff receive. Provost Rice says that equality is one thing, but equity is another. **Kramida** says that his presentation of the administration and GAAC viewpoints is accurate; **Provost Rice** says the framing of administration thinking of GAs as "expendable" is completely inaccurate. **Perkey** says that GAs are professionals being trained in a profession, and that sometimes TAs are treated as just graders. Perkey asks how the UMD can help TAs develop their pedagogy and skills for jobs; she argues that giving TAs more options for leading teaching would help reduce the perception that GAs are only there to provide grading for coursework. **Provost Rice** agrees with Perkey's point and says she will speak with other administrators about it. **Kramida** says that the issue of collective bargaining rights for GAs still needs to be addressed.

4. Childcare (5 min)

- a. Matching GA parental leave (currently 6 weeks) to the 12 weeks of supported parental leave guaranteed to faculty and staff
- b. Increasing Care@Work benefits

Perkey introduces the topic of childcare and family leave; GAs receive six weeks while faculty and staff get 12 weeks. She points out that six weeks is inadequate if a mother has a Cesarean and that the existing policy for GA parents forces them to say that they have different children. Perkey points to the Family and Medical Leave guidance that promises 12 weeks of family leave, at the federal time. Perkey says that Covid has particularly affected parent GAs and asks how UMD

can improve its support for them. **Provost Rice** thanks Perkey for the presentation and the information.

5. Removing payment for international students on an internship. (8 min)

- a. Other Universities do not charge this amount.

Hoyle introduces the way that international PhDs have to pay course tuition in order to take internships, during the summer through ISSS. He says that there are federal requirements, which the university can't change, but says that other universities don't necessarily have these fees. He proposes that UMD could either reimburse individual departments for the tuition or in the longer-term push for changes in federal statutes or research other universities' practices. **Dean Fetter** says he has spoken with the DSO for ISSS, who has to ensure UMD compliance with federal immigration regulation. He says that internships are approved under CPT and the DSO needs to certify that the internship is a critical part of the students' program of study, which requires an advisor letter. Dean Fetter says this is why students need to be registered in this way and that the university can't treat certain students differently. He suggests that this is not a productive use of the meeting, because these policies are followed by the DSO. **Hoyle** asks if there is a way that departments could reimburse this. **Dean Fetter** says that is an individual department decision, which they could pursue. **Hoyle** is unhappy with this option and asks if a meeting could be set up with ISSS to discuss this further.

6. Removing the course drop fees (5 min)

- a. If receiving tuition remission, it does not make sense to pay a fee for dropping a course
- b. Help in understanding 'schedule adjustment period' but there are still financial consequences during this period

Hopper introduces the topic of students being charged course drop fees during schedule adjustments, where students must re-enroll in the same number of credits when they swap or else they are charged a fee. **Hopper** points out the high cost of tuition fees, the recent GSG resolution to drop these fees, and asks why GAs are charged this fee when they receive tuition remission?

Dean Fetter says that undergraduates don't have these penalties because they have a flat tuition, whereas grad students are charged per credit. **Fetter** says that the fee can be canceled by any unit, at their discretion and in justified circumstances, such as when it is necessary to accommodate GA duties. Fetter says the fee is meant to offset the cost of having an "empty seat" left in courses from late course drops and that the penalty is an incentive to avoid GAs doing that. **Hoyle** says the penalty is not an incentive, it is punitive. Hoyle says knowledge about this penalty is hidden and GAs are surprised by a sudden charge. **Hopper** adds that the fee requires maintaining the same credits, particularly at different course levels.

Dean Fetter says this is because of differing tuition rates and GAs can always go to their department admin to have this penalty waived. **Hoyle** acknowledges the work-around but says that GAs receiving these penalties is still a problem. Hoyle

says it is within the university's purview; **Dean Fetter** says it is controlled by the registrar. **Hopper** asks how these penalties can be dropped, working with the registrar. **Dean Fetter** says he meets with the directors of graduate study and will remind them about their ability to eliminate the penalty; the next meeting is tomorrow. Dean Fetter says those directors should all be aware of this issue. **DiBella** asks if the penalties are set by the registrar and that to waive particular penalties GAs would have to go to individual departments. **Dean Fetter** agrees. **Hoyle** asks if Dean Fetter could advocate for us in the registrar meeting. **Dean Fetter** says yes, but that there has to be a reason for GAs to drop a course. **Hoyle** and **Kramida** disagree. **Provost Rice** offers to speak with the Registrar's office to understand how often this penalty is charged and more data, before a decision can be made.

7. Acceptance process, offer letters, benefit process to-do list (12 min)

- a. Require departments to include in offer letters: direct report information, list of HR contacts, where to access pay stubs, list of necessary tax forms, how to enroll in benefits
- b. Require offer letters to include specific deadlines for, for example, submitting W-9 forms, completing benefit selection
- c. Making details of health insurance plans publicly available, so grad students don't need to wait for login details to research options

Goffin introduces this topic, asking for more transparency in how GAs are provided offer letters and the benefits described in them. Goffin says that departments have a lot of discretion in how they describe their positions: salaries are included, but benefits or supervisor appointment might not be. Goffin mentions a fellow GA that transferred from an external fellowship to a GA position, leading to a possible lapse in healthcare. Goffin mentions receiving an uncertain letter about whether healthcare would be charged biweekly or in a lump sum. Goffin mentions that these benefits are on the offer letter template, but there is no requirement for detail or mentioning benefits other than healthcare. **Provost Rice** thanks Goffin for his presentation and asks Dean Fetter to bring this topic up with another group. Provost Rice asks for more specific information about the issues. **Dean Fetter** says he's not sure how he could make this requirement mandatory. **Provost Rice** says Fetter can look into the issue. She thanks GAAC for taking the time to make this presentation and emphasizes that she and other staff value GAs for providing essential work to the campus. Provost Rice says Dean Fetter has been advocating for GAs and wants to acknowledge friction on the CBR issue as well, but also to express her gratitude to the student leaders.