



THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL

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SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 491
Higher Education – Collective Bargaining – Graduate Assistants
March 7, 2019
Urging an Unfavorable Report

I write to share my concerns regarding Senate Bill 491, which authorizes graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

Graduate assistants are first and foremost students. Most are doctoral students. The goal is to train and equip them to be the next generation of researchers and scholars—the producers of new knowledge and the foundation for Maryland’s leadership in the knowledge economy.

Graduate assistantships are an important component of doctoral education. Indeed, some doctoral programs require students to complete an assistantship. Graduate research assistants learn how to do original research under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Most teaching assistants lead discussion sections and provide help to undergraduate students under the guidance of a faculty member who is responsible for the course. In doing so, they learn the subject more deeply by learning to explain it to others. It is often said that you do not really know something until you can teach it to someone else. In both cases, the assistantship is much closer to an apprenticeship or traineeship than to traditional work or employment.

In addition to this valuable faculty mentoring, graduate assistants receive a stipend, health benefits, and tuition remission. This makes graduate education affordable and allows students to support themselves while working toward their degree.

Graduate assistantships are not inexpensive for the University. The University invests about \$180 million per year in graduate assistantships—equal to \$270,000 per PhD graduate, in the form of stipends, health insurance, and tuition. It usually is less expensive to hire a postdoctoral fellow for a research project or a lecturer to teach a class. We use graduate assistants because doctoral education is central to the mission of a research university, and the research and teaching experiences that graduate assistantships provide are an important part of their education, so that they can become the next generation of researchers and teachers.

The University of Maryland, College Park, has 83 doctoral programs. Every program is different, and they compete with similar programs at the very best institutions across the country. Graduate programs have a strong incentive to offer attractive graduate assistantships in order to attract the best and brightest students from across the United States and around the world.

Collective bargaining would create a one-size-fits-all approach that would limit the flexibility of programs to tailor graduate assistantships. Research assistantships, which are included in SB 491, are particularly difficult to adapt to collective bargaining. There often is a large overlap between the research a student does for a faculty member as part of the faculty member's research grant or contract, and the research the student does for his or her dissertation. The former is essential training for the latter, and it is difficult and often impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. Completing a dissertation—a piece of original research and scholarship—requires long hours of effort, in a lab or in front of a computer, regardless of whether the student has an assistantship. For this reason, most institutions that have collective bargaining for teaching assistants do not extend collective bargaining to research assistants.

Collective bargaining would change the relationship between faculty and students from mentor and mentee to employer and employee. It also would also change the University's relationship with graduate assistants and limit our ability to address problems as they arise and tailor solutions to the situation of a particular student.

We have a robust system of shared governance. Graduate students serve on the Graduate Council, which helps make policy for graduate education, and on the University Senate, which advises the President on all campus policy issues, including those relating to graduate assistants.

The Graduate School is an advocate for graduate students and graduate assistants. We actively work to address their concerns, collectively and individually. In response to concerns expressed as part of the "Meet and Confer" process that graduate assistants were working too many hours, we developed a statement of mutual expectations to facilitate communication between faculty and students about duties and responsibilities and work hours. We commissioned a time-use study by a faculty expert and conduct surveys to check for incidence of long hours. We have policies that allow for sick and parental leave. We have established a grievance procedure that graduate students can use if they believe they are being treated unfairly by faculty or staff. Collective bargaining is not necessary to address student concerns.

We have been working to increase student stipends. Over the last year, we have increased minimum stipends by almost 9 percent, and minimum stipends are now at or above the median of our Big Ten peers (see attached). We will increase the minimum stipend by another 4 percent on July 1, subject to the availability of funding. Average stipends are considerably above the minimums, and are above the average cost of education when tuition and health benefits are included (see attached). The average stipend is equivalent to \$27 per hour, which is about equal to the average wage in Maryland. (This does not include tuition benefit worth more than \$30,000 per year, or the health insurance subsidy worth over \$4000 per year.)

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns about Senate Bill 491.

Steve Fetter
Associate Provost and Dean, The Graduate School
University of Maryland, College Park

Minimum Graduate Assistant Stipends and Collective Bargaining Status
 Big Ten Public Universities, Spring 2019
 Standard (0.5 FTE, 20 hr/week) appointment

Institution	Minimum Stipend		Collective Bargaining		
	Academic Year	Full Year	Teaching Assistants	Administrative Assistants	Research Assistants
Rutgers ¹	25,969	29,605	Y	Y	Y
Michigan ²	21,083		Y	Y	
Penn State ²	20,205				
Iowa	19,225	23,489	Y	Y	
Wisconsin	18,350	22,427			
Maryland³	17,542	22,158			
Illinois	17,439	23,252	Y	Y	
Ohio State	16,515	22,020			
Michigan St ⁴	15,405	20,596	Y		
Purdue	15,071	18,086			
Minnesota	15,005	20,006			
Indiana	9,816	11,779			
Nebraska	9,675	12,900			

¹Standard appointment is 15 hours per week.

²No minimum full-year stipend.

³For 9.5-month appointments as of 4/1/19. All TAs, and 60% of all academic-year GA appointments, are 9.5-month appointments. The minimum stipend for 9-month appointments is \$16,619.

⁴For TA. The minimum academic-year stipend for non-union AAs and RAs is \$13,845.

UMD Average Cost of Attendance and Average Stipend (AY18-19)

Cost	Graduate Student	Graduate Assistant
Non-resident tuition (10 credits/sem)	\$30,960	—
Mandatory fees	\$1,620	\$1,620
Off-campus rent and utilities	\$9,314	\$9,314
Food and dining out	\$5,004	\$5,004
Personal expenses	\$1,144	\$1,144
Books and supplies	\$1,250	\$1,250
Health insurance (SHIP v. State/Kaiser)	\$1,859	\$572
Average cost of attendance	\$51,151	\$18,904
Average stipend	—	\$20,448