

UW–Madison administrators must support graduate workers and the research and education at our university by:

1. Paying grad workers a living wage
2. Providing full relief from mandatory fees for grad workers
3. Ending the discriminatory international student fee
4. Approving clear, consistent, and quality policies for grad workers
5. Training administrators on the new policies for grad workers
6. Creating a standing committee that includes grad workers to improve policies for grad workers

This letter is an attempt to use highly-selective statistics to tell grad workers that we are not facing material hardship.

Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus admit that they are violating the principles of shared governance to change our employment policies behind closed doors.

We demand that UW–Madison administrators do better.



April 18, 2019



Sara Trongone
 Chance McMahon
 Co-Presidents, Teaching Assistants' Association
 520 University Ave., Suite 220
 Madison, WI 53703

Dear Sara and Chance,

Thank you for your recent messages on behalf of the Teaching Assistants' Association. We appreciate the time and energy your membership has spent advocating on behalf of graduate students, including at your recent events in Bascom Hall.

We will do our best in this response to address some of your points and hope that we will have a chance to talk soon in person.

First and foremost, **we want to echo your statement that teaching assistants are valued** by students, faculty and administration. Without the dedication and hard work of our graduate students, UW-Madison would not be the world-class institution it is today.

The TAA represents and advocates for all grad workers, not just teaching assistants.

You are also correct that UW-Madison has taken significant steps to invest in our graduate students and **bring stipends to a more competitive level with our peers**—at a rate of increase that has far outpaced other employment categories on campus.

In addition to tuition remissions and access to the same university group health care plans as the faculty and staff have, **we recently announced a 9% increase in the minimum TA stipend for fiscal year 2020. This raises the minimum stipend from \$18,350 to \$20,000 for a 50% TA appointment, with many departments and programs paying even higher amounts.** Note that just this one increase in the stipend minimum is actually more than the total amount of segregated fees paid by students per year.

This raise excludes other grad workers on campus: project assistants, research assistants, hourly employees. The letter does not note that many teaching assistants work at 33% appointment levels. With this new raise, they will earn \$13,200 next year.

Overall, our minimum TA stipends have risen 41.9% over an eight-year period. We've gone from one of the lowest TA stipends in the Big Ten to being above the average, **though we do recognize that rising cost-of-living expenses create difficult burdens for graduate and undergraduate students.**

Graduate worker pay at UW–Madison is still far behind many schools in the Big Ten and our other peer institutions.

The minimum teaching assistant pay has only risen an average of 3.4% annually over the last fifteen years. Project assistant pay has only risen an average of 2.8% annually over that time.

Many grad workers still have to work two or three jobs off campus to make ends meet. Many are discouraged from this additional work by their advisors and supervisors. Many grad workers survive by going to food banks. Grad workers are choosing not to pay medical bills so they can stay in school. Many grad workers are dropping out due to lack of support from this university. Grad workers have been sharing these stories directly with Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus over the last year. These administrators choose to ignore the material hardship of many grad workers.

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Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus are mischaracterizing our argument. The TAA is not asking for exemptions from fees. We are calling on UW-Madison to provide relief from these fees as a condition of our employment. Graduate assistants should not have to pay one in every ten dollars we make back to the university in order to work here.

The UW Board of Regents lists populations of students who are currently exempted from segregated fees, including veterans, children and spouses of veterans, children and surviving spouses certain public service workers, among other groups. UW-Madison also covers the segregated fees for students covered by certain scholarships.

Our approach and philosophy have been to provide greater financial support and flexibility for graduate students through increased stipends rather than exemptions from fees.

As you know, we currently do not exempt graduate students, or any other population of students, from segregated fees. These fees have increased \$75 over the last five years to \$641.04 per semester. However, not all graduate students pay the full segregated fee amount as it is linked to the number of registered credits. Only 53% of graduate students pay the full segregated fees.

These segregated fees have more than doubled in the last fifteen years.

Philosophically, we believe all students – graduate and undergraduate alike – must pay segregated fees to support high-quality services that are available to all students, such as access to University Health Services, the upkeep and support of the Wisconsin Union and the myriad of student services that receive allocable fees. Services and programs supported by segregated fees help make a UW-Madison education and experience highly attractive and enhance opportunities for success for all students. In our view, allowing certain populations exceptions or opt-outs could lead to others asking to be similarly exempted and ultimately undermine the funding model that provides valuable services to all students.

We are not asking for the ability to opt out of fees. Student services should remain fully-funded; the university should pay the fees for grad workers as a condition of our employment. Shared governance bodies on campus – including the Associated Students of Madison and the Faculty Senate – passed resolutions last semester calling on UW-Madison administrators to fully cover segregated fees for grad workers.

In addition, international graduate students uniquely benefit from services provided by International Student Services (ISS) that are funded through the international student fee.

Through this fee, ISS staff provide information and programs to international students about the campus and community and provide support and assistance concerning visas and related immigration issues. It is important that we maintain high-quality services for our international students.

No international student—not just international graduate students—should have to pay this discriminatory fee for their surveillance.

When this fee on international students was originally proposed in 2003, a committee of faculty, students, and staff recommended that the costs of monitoring international students to comply with the Patriot Act “be absorbed as part of the necessary institutional costs of fulfilling our academic mission, and as such, should therefore ideally be covered by the usual sources of funding for administrative costs, namely [general public revenue] and tuition.” Chancellor John Wiley called that recommendation a permanent solution for ongoing costs of running the program for international students. Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus need to keep this promise.

UW-Madison already charges international students more tuition than domestic nonresident students. The tuition for international students has increased \$10,000 in the last three years.

We also are aware of questions related to the Graduate Assistant Policies and Procedures (GAPP) Committee. We have worked collaboratively with graduate students and other members of the campus community on the development of consistent policies and procedures regarding employment-related matters.

This process has taken longer than expected, but is now nearly complete. As stated in our committee charter, we’ve been pursuing feedback from the deans’ offices which has resulted in a refined document focused on teaching and project assistants. We hope to have this released to you before the end of the semester. Specific language regarding research assistants will be added later after a thoughtful consideration of the nature of the appointment and the requirements of extramural grant sponsors.

Grad student representatives met with administrators in 2017-18 to translate the 2009 contract with graduate workers into a set of policies and procedures. All members of that committee made a final recommendation to Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus more than a year ago. Since that point, these administrators have been meeting with deans behind closed doors to change the proposed policies. They had from 2009 to 2018 to seek the advice of these deans to involve them in this collaborative process; they are now choosing to give our administrators the final word.

We want to emphasize that it was important that this was a highly collaborative process. The policies and procedures document will live on the Office of Human Resources website and will be released publicly. We will also send a broader update to all graduate students. The current GAPP Committee continues to work on the grievance process associated with these policies. We expect that particular report to be delivered to us this summer. Any subsequent policy-making and procedure evaluation will be done by newly appointed committees as specific needs arise.

Although the version of policies and procedures proposed by the entire GAPP Committee includes research assistants, lecturers, reader/graders, and hourly employees, Vice Chancellor Heller and Dean Karpus are making the unilateral decisions to change the proposed policies for RAs and to exclude the other types of grad workers from the policies and procedures.

Who gets to decide when a specific need arises? Policies for grad workers have not improved in over a decade. We need action now for policies like paid parental leave, coordinated ADA and McBurney services, and paid departmental service work, among many other issues.

We appreciate our ongoing partnership and hope that this information is useful. We would like to invite you to 217 Bascom Hall at 2 p.m. on Friday, April 26 for further discussion of these important issues. This joint meeting would be in lieu of our previously scheduled sessions.

We are committed to providing graduate students a world-class education and research experience – as well as competitive support – at UW-Madison.



Thank you again for your partnership and for all you do to support the mission of UW-Madison.
We look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,



Laurent Heller
Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration



William J. Karpus
Dean, Graduate School
Professor, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Vice Chancellor Heller
and Dean Karpus —

Please revise
and re submit!

