



Teaching Assistants' Association | 520 University Avenue, Suite 220, Madison, WI 53703  
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Dear Chancellor Blank, Dean Karpus, Vice Chancellor Heller, and Patrick Sheehan:

As the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) becomes a significant risk for people around the world as well in Madison, our membership has put serious thought into protections for graduate students in the event of emergency closings or online-only classes for either a limited or prolonged period of time.

We recognize that the Chancellor has recently asked all departments to draft a contingency plan for what to do if the university shifts to online/remote learning; while these plans are being formulated, we ask that protections around graduate labor are included in these conversations. After considerable internal deliberation and research, our members drafted the list below of the main concerns that we expect the graduate school and all departments to address. We greatly appreciate the steps that are being taken to protect all university affiliates during this outbreak and hope that our suggestions prove useful.

1. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must provide unlimited paid sick time:**
  - a. The University must update sick leave policies for global outbreaks on the verge of pandemic, and ensure that all graduate workers and those who advise graduate workers are aware of them. We demand that this includes paid sick time for workers to care for themselves or family or household members with illnesses, and have time to self-isolate if needed.
  - b. The University must ensure that graduate workers will not lose their health insurance if they cannot perform their work duties.
  - c. The University must provide all necessary and reasonable accommodations to students and workers who are immunocompromised and therefore at greater risk of developing fatal complications.
  - d. Students should not lose tuition credits if they need to leave; serve as a caretaker for an affected loved one, young child, or elderly family member; or become sick.
2. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must limit the burden on graduate workers (specifically TAs and LSAs) if and when we move to an online system.** In this, we are asking for fair compensation (if appointment hours are exceeded), as well as adequate timelines when graduate workers have to rewrite course materials with little advance notice. Instructors and TAs must be given institutional support to learn to use new online platforms.
3. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must clearly articulate all levels of closures with sufficient notice to all affected parties.** We expect graduate students will not be disproportionately asked to put themselves at risk by going to campus. Specifically, we expect that labs will have formal contingency plans within departments that include plans



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defining which lab operations must continue for essential research and animal care, and how those labs will operate to ensure safety for those who work there.

4. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must ensure that graduate workers are not put under additional economic strain by the outbreak.**
  1. The University must ensure that graduate workers will NOT lose pay if they cannot perform their work duties (especially for PAs and hourly workers).
  2. Graduate students must not be asked to shoulder the costs of canceled conferences, especially (but not only) when these conferences are required by departments. The University should be prepared to cover the costs of nonrefundable conference travel for graduate workers for the spring semester.
  3. If and when we shift to online/remote learning, all digital necessities should be provided free of cost. This includes (but is not limited to) laptops, microphones, webcams, and free/discounted wifi plans.
  4. The University must provide support, in the form of paid leave, for workers and students with children while daycares and schools may be closing.
5. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must provide support and protections for students with disabilities who may not be able to complete their work duties because of university closures and digital access requirements.** As an example, some graduate workers may not have the equipment to work at home with their disability.
6. We acknowledge that Homeland Security has announced it will be giving guidance to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) users in the near future, and we attest that the University of Wisconsin-Madison **must ensure protections for international students whose visas may be compromised if we move to an online model.**
7. The University **must promise no eviction from university housing.**
8. The University of Wisconsin–Madison **must provide information and resources about the illness, how it spreads, and best safety practices.** These efforts **must actively dispel racist, xenophobic assumptions about the disease,** such as racist characterizations of Asian people representing a public health threat.
9. The University must provide reporting mechanisms that are anonymous and must not, under any circumstances, lead to any involvement of law enforcement, ICE, or detention of callers against their will as a result of using the hotline.



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1. We ask that the University offers medical care related to COVID-19 to students for free, including supplies to protect against infection and covering the cost of testing for the virus.
2. We greatly appreciate the steps that your offices and other University affiliates have taken to ensure the health and safety of all employees and students at UW–Madison. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to clarify, disseminate information about, or enact any of the above policies.

Sincerely,  
The Teaching Assistants' Association