Justification for a Faculty Senate Resolution regarding Graduate Assistant Compensation

Being able to successfully recruit, develop, and confer degrees on graduate students is highly dependent on the availability of competitive financial support through Graduate Assistantships. Stipends for UW-Milwaukee Graduate Assistants have fallen even further behind our peers in recent years, and are increasingly hindering recruitment and retention of high-quality graduate students in many of our Schools and Colleges. A recent working group report (delivered in September 2012) carefully addressed the issues and offered a path forward. Stipends for Research Assistants have been raised already as per the advice of that report, since these are generally funded by extramural grants.

However, increased stipends for Teaching and Project Assistants have not yet been adjusted upward, since internal funding (estimated at about $2 million) is needed and has been hard to identify, given our lean campus funding environment. Despite these obstacles, the University Committee feels that given the crucial role that graduate assistantships play in our undergraduate instructional programs and in the health of our graduate programs, it is appropriate to highlight this issue to campus administration through a Faculty Senate Resolution, and urge them to seek all available means to successfully address it.

University Committee
Mark D. Schwartz, Chair
Margo Anderson
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Faculty Senate Resolution Regarding Graduate Assistant Compensation

WHEREAS the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, one of two doctoral degree granting universities in the UW-System, is charged by the state of Wisconsin with conducting graduate level research, supporting graduate level education, and contributing to the economic development of the state of Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS a special working group tasked with comparing graduate stipends between Graduate Assistants at the UW-Milwaukee to those the committee considered “peer-institutions,” issued a report finding that most 50% Graduate Teaching Assistants at UW-Milwaukee are, according to the comparison, underpaid by at least 2,000 dollars a year;¹ and

WHEREAS the same report acknowledges that the majority of Project Assistant (PA) and Teaching Assistant (TA) appointments at the 33% level and some PA appointments at the 50% level are near or below the Federal poverty level,² and

WHEREAS, in the face of this remarkably low pay, UW-Milwaukee Schools and Colleges are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain high quality graduate students.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate urges the Board of Regents and University of Wisconsin System administrators to advocate for fair compensation for the faculty, staff, and graduate students of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate stands with our Graduate Assistants in calling for the university administration, specifically Chancellor Lovell and Provost Britz, to publicize how low Graduate Assistant pay at UW-Milwaukee is hindering undergraduate education, research innovation, and economic growth in Milwaukee, Southeastern Wisconsin, the State of Wisconsin, and the Nation.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate joins our Graduate Assistants in calling for campus administration, in cooperation with the Graduate School, to introduce Teaching Assistant (TA) salaries as a line item in the campus instructional budget, starting in the 2015-2016 academic year, and to include in that budget additional resources that will raise baseline 50% TA appointment salaries to at least $15,000 a year, a minimal level to improve UW-Milwaukee’s competitiveness with its peer institutions.

² Ibid. page 5