

UC, 11/16/15



Date: July 21, 2015

To: Darrell Bazzell, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration
Marsha Mailick, Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education
Sarah Mangelsdorf, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

From: Laurie Cox, formerly International Student Services

Wendy Crone, Graduate School

Catharine DeRubeis, Human Resources

Ben Griffiths, Legal

Anne Gunther, College of Letters & Science

Susan Hagness, College of Engineering

W Crone (on behalf of committee)

RE: Revised Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Assistantships

Per its charge, the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate Assistantships engaged in analysis and conversations with key staff and faculty to determine an implementation plan for a new rate-based method for graduate assistant pay.

Currently the UW-Madison essentially sets a single rate for a 100% graduate assistantship appointment and units adjust the appointment percentage between 1% and 75% to achieve either the necessary hours of work (in the case of TA appointments) or the desired amount of compensation (in the case of RA appointments). Rather than setting an individual's pay by adjusting the percentage, peer institutions primarily use a range of rates so that an appointment can be competitive and consistent with market factors in the field.

The overarching goals of this effort to design a new rate-based method for graduate assistant pay were to:

- harmonize graduate assistantship appointments between RA, TA and PA;
- allow for market-informed compensation;
- provide more consistency with national standards of operation, and
- reduce the confusion faced by prospective students in the recruiting process.

We engaged in this process using the prescribed features identified in the committee's charge memo of November 17, 2014:

- "Maintenance of the current categories of graduate assistants: RA, TA and PA
- A minimum rate to be set centrally with an annual review/decision process
- A cap on the total of all assistant appointments for an individual at 50% (with very rare exceptions)

- Tuition remission and benefits for all graduate assistant appointments at or above 33%
- Appointment percentage directly tied to hours of work for all graduate assistant categories
- The possibility of a cost neutral implementation, while allowing for the flexibility to accommodate different market factors faced by programs/departments"

After careful consideration, data gathering, and further follow up consultation with you in our meetings of January 12, 2015 and March 11, 2015, in addition to numerous meetings with individuals and small group discussions (see Appendix 1), we suggest the attributes delineated below for the new rate-based method for setting graduate assistant pay. These attributes will permit a cost neutral implementation, while also having the flexibility to accommodate different market factors faced by programs/departments where additional funding is available through other sources (e.g., federal grants, discretionary gift funds). This new system for graduate appointments will allow units to use their existing resources in ways that were not previously available and may provide some units with additional flexibility to effectively reapportion resources to benefit graduate assistants and the graduate program's competitiveness.

We strongly recommend an implementation date of **May 23, 2016** in order to facilitate the transition between the Spring and Summer 2016 terms, and to allow enough time for Business Services and the Office of Human Resources (OHR) to make the necessary programming changes. Communication and training will need to take place during the 2015-16 academic year, along with necessary policy modification in OHR and the Graduate School.

Attributes of the New Rate-Based System

In order to be consistent with current State Statute, we recommend **maintaining the current categories of graduate assistants: research assistant (RA), teaching assistant (TA), and project/program assistant (PA)**. We recommend keeping both the standard and senior teaching assistantship titles, given that some departments have an interest in appointing experienced TAs with a title that acknowledges their advancement. It should be noted that PA reader/grader, student hourly/student help, and lecturer (SA) appointments are also employment categories available to graduate students, so these categories should be included in the graduate assistantship total employment discussed below, including the need for a minimum rate.

Our main recommendation is that a **minimum rate be set centrally with an annual review/decision process across all assistantship categories**. We recommend that this minimum rate be set at the current standard TA rate (with any future increases in pay plan to be applied to the minimum rate). Further, **rates may be set above the minimum within a "unit."** (The term "unit" is used to describe a department, center, or operational area as determined by the school, college or division(s) in which the unit resides. In general a unit will be a department or center. A school, college, or division may approve the definition of a smaller unit within an existing larger organizational entity on campus that employs graduate students. However, the definition of a unit may NOT be as small as the principal investigator level.) **Divisional (e.g., school/college) review and approval of graduate assistant rate levels above the minimum is required unless otherwise specified by the division.**

Within a unit (e.g. department/center), different levels of rates can be defined based on experience and duties of the graduate assistant. Rates may differ between TA, PA and RA

categories within a unit; however, rates must be consistently applied across the unit to all graduate students employed within a given category (e.g. PA) or subcategory (e.g. Senior TA, or locally defined working title such as Advanced RA). Exceptions regarding the uniformity of the rates used within a unit may be granted by the Graduate School (upon request of the employing unit) when a graduate student is within a lab/center/work area where students from multiple units will be working in one place performing similar functions. It should be noted that an individual graduate student may hold multiple appointments with different rates as long as the total percentage meets the restrictions described below.

We recommended that **a maximum rate should not be set centrally** given that various market forces in graduate programs and prior experience/qualifications of graduate students range widely across campus. However, a division (e.g., school/college) may choose to impose a maximum rate. Note that regardless of the lack of a central maximum or a divisional maximum, the NIH maximum must be utilized for any graduate assistant appointed on an NIH grant.

Under the new rate-based approach to setting stipends, we recommend that **the maximum total graduate assistantship appointment level is 50% for a graduate student during a given semester within the academic year and summer inclusive of all appointments held by the individual student. Graduate students must be enrolled to hold an assistantship, both during the academic year and summer.** Full-time enrollment is expected for Fall and Spring terms; half-time enrollment is expected for the Summer term.

Graduate students holding an F or J visa are permitted to engage in no more than 20 hours of compensated employment per week during Fall and Spring terms inclusive of all appointments held by the individual student.

Appointments can have any value between 1% and 50%, but the total of all appointments for an individual must be less than or equal to 50%. It is the shared responsibility of the appointing unit and the individual student to keep the total of all employment, inclusive of all TA, PA, RA, PA reader/grader, student hourly/student help, and lecturer (SA) appointments, at or below 50%. **Exceptions for an individual student holding total appointment(s) greater than 50% may only be granted by the Graduate School for situations where undergraduate teaching needs require additional capacity** (exceptions may be granted for domestic students during both the academic year and summer; exceptions may be granted for international students on an F or J visa during summer only).

Consistent with current policy, **RAs should not be given work assignments unrelated to their own educational pursuits.** RA appointments support the scholarly pursuit of a thesis or dissertation; however, the effort required to achieve satisfactory progress towards a graduate degree typically exceeds the percentage of the RA appointment. In other words, caps on the percentage of appointments should not be seen as a limit on academic work or time that a student may spend on their research/scholarship. Graduate assistants with duties unrelated to their own course of study should be appointed as a PA rather than an RA.

Consistent with current policy and State statute, **tuition remission and benefits will be provided for all graduate assistant appointments at or above 33% during a given academic term.** High stipend levels with low appointment percentage below 33% should be avoided to ensure that the graduate assistant appropriately receives a tuition waiver and that the tuition remission surcharge is paid.

Health insurance benefits, sick leave, and vacation are recommended to be applied uniformly across all graduate assistant appointments, including TA, PA and RA appointments. At the beginning of each appointment period a graduate assistant will be credited with a bank of sick leave days dependent on the length of the appointment period. Unused sick leave will accumulate (with restrictions) from appointment period to appointment period only within the same department and in the same title. Graduate assistants with an annual total appointment of 50% will earn paid vacation at a rate of 11 days per fiscal year. Lower appointment percentages will be prorated. The scheduling of vacation days is subject to the approval of the supervisor and must be taken during the period of the appointment. If a graduate assistant must work on a University of Wisconsin System Legal Holiday due to the required duties of the position, the supervisor should work with the student to adjust their schedule in the weeks before or after the legal holiday.

Hours of work will be accounted for by current methods for all graduate assistantships categories. Additionally, there is no change to the existing practices of effort reporting for RAs supported by federal grants or contracts.

It should be noted that Fellowships and Traineeships are not considered to be employment and such a stipend received as a student can be added to assistantship appointments without concern about exceeding the 50% maximum set by campus; however, sponsor guidelines must be followed (e.g. NIH NRSA guidelines limit concurrent employment).

Additionally, limited/academic staff who are also graduate students would be subject to the current load stipulations specified in <http://www.ohr.wisc.edu/polproced/UPPP/1103.htm> (i.e. combinations of appointment percentages and academic load percentage exceeding 175% can only be exceeded under very unusual circumstances because of the difficulty that such academic loads place on the ability of the employee to perform their responsibilities).

Summary and Next Steps

The committee based the above recommendations on a number of consultations and consideration of a range of issues, including FICA, financial aid implications, regulations impacting international students, and federal grant regulations. The 50% cap was designed to be consistent with peer institution practices and ensure that graduate assistants are considered to be graduate students first and employees second.

The date of **May 23, 2016 is recommended for implementation** to facilitate the transition between the Spring and Summer 2016 terms. Implementation was delayed from the summer of 2015 to the summer of 2016 for two main reasons: we needed time to determine which campus business operations would be impacted by the changes as well as lead time for the necessary changes to be made to our administrative systems. Additionally, with the State budget situation coming to the fore over the course of the academic year, it quickly became clear that people were confusing this change with the discussion of budget cuts. In order to avoid confusion and take this issue out of the communication cycle associated with the budget, town hall meetings and broader discussions were halted. Such communication still need to be done and we suggest that they should occur beginning in Fall 2015.

Now that this Ad Hoc Committee's work has come to a close, we suggest that the senior leadership charge a new group with somewhat different membership to take up issues of implementation, training, and communication. Although members of the committee have met

on several occasions with individuals from Business Services, there are still a number of open questions remaining on changes in programming, workflow, and the training that will be required.

The new committee should be charged with members that includes representation from the Graduate School, Legal, and Human Resources and at a minimum should consult with academic and research units, International Student Services, Bursar, and Accounting Services. We suggest the following individuals:

Bill Karpus, Graduate School (chair)
Ben Griffiths, Legal
Catharine DeRubeis, Human Resources
Julie Karpelenia, VCRGE HR
Martha Kerner, Administration

A thorough communications plan will need to be developed and should include graduate students, graduate programs, and staff handling graduate student appointments and payroll. For example, we were in the process of planning the following actions when the timeline was moved:

- Re-engagement with key individuals and stakeholder groups listed in Appendix 1;
- Short University Communications story in InsideWI highlighting changes and inviting individuals to engage in town hall meetings;
- Town hall meetings with graduate students and graduate faculty;
- Detailed University Communications story in InsideWI with additional details of the implementation and impacts;
- Memo to Human Resources contacts on appointments for both new and continuing graduate students;
- Distribution of an offer letter template that is reframed in the new system.

Appendix 1

The following consultations by the Ad Hoc Committee members were conducted between October, 2014 and April 2015:

- Deans Council
 - Consultation October 22, 8:00-10:00, 3180 Grainger (Griffiths, Lund, Crone, DeRubeis)
- University Communications
 - Consultation with Terry Devitt, November 7th, 2014 (Crone)
 - Consultation with Terry Devitt and Kelly Tyrrell, November 18th (subcommittee)
 - Crone updated Terry Devitt 2/8/15 and indicated that campus communications are on hold until Fall 2015
- Research and Sponsored Programs
 - Subcommittee consultation with Bob Andresen, November 25, 2014
- University Committee
 - Consultation November 10, 2014, 1:00-1:30, 260 Bascom (Crone)
 - Follow up consultation January 26, 2015, 1:00-1:30, Bascom (Crone)
- Graduate School Academic Planning Council (GSAPC)
 - Consultation November 21, 2014, 1:30-2:30, 52 Bascom (Crone)
 - Consultation April 17, 2015, 1:30-2:30, 52 Bascom (Crone)

- Associate Deans for Research
 - Consultation November 21, 2014, 3:30-5:00, 52 Bascom (Crone, Hagness)
 - Consultation January 16, 2015, 3:30-5:00, 52 Bascom (Crone, Hagness)
 - Consultation June 19, 2015, 3:30-5:00, 52 Bascom (Crone, Hagness)
- L&S ADs consult November 20, 2014, 12:00-1:00 (Crone, DeRubeis)
- University Council on Academic Affairs and Assessment, November 17, 2014, 10-11:30, 260 Bascom (Susan Hagness)
- Directors of Graduate Study
 - January 15, 2015, 10-12 (Crone)
- Graduate Program Coordinators
 - April 30, 2015 (Crone)
- Individual consultations
 - Ron Harris, English, December 11, 2014 by phone (Crone)
 - Matt Sanders, Chemistry, December 2, 2014 by phone (Crone)
 - Karl Scholz, L&S, December 16, 2014 by phone (Crone)
 - Chuck Lauhon and Paul Hutson, School of Pharmacy, December 2, 2014 by phone and emails (Crone)
 - Heather Daniels, Secretary of the Academic Staff, January 30, 2015 by email (Crone)
 - Joyce Zander, Curriculum and Instruction, February 26, 2015, by phone (Crone)
 - Jeanne Hendricks, College of Engineering, March 3, 2015, by phone (Crone)
- Wednesday March 4th, 2015, 1:30-3:30 - group consultation with selected campus staff in schools/colleges and departments/programs (Crone, Griffiths), including Brian Buebenzer (L&S), Matt Sanders (Chemistry), Ron Harris (English), Anya Wanner (English), Jenny Dahlberg (Vet Med), Heather Daniels (Sec Acad Staff), Nancy Westphal-Johnson (L&S), Dina Christianson (COE), Tricia Dries (COE), Jeanne Hendricks (COE), Chuck Lauhon (Pharm), Joyce Zander (Curric&Instr)
- Consultation with Tim Norris March 21 and March 22 with business services group (Crone, Griffiths)
- Meetings (Crone, DeRubeis, Griffiths) with business services group to identify process issues on February 18th 3:30-4:30, March 10th 12:30-1:30, April 7th 9:30-10:30, April 22nd 2:00-3:00; including
 - Martha Kerner, Assistant Vice Chancellor – Administration
Dept. mkerner@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Cathie Easter, Bursar – Bursar Dept. ceaster@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Dan Langer, Controller – Accounting Services Dept. dlanger@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Susie Maloney, Financial Mgmt Supv - Accounting Services
Dept. smaloney@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Jose Carus, Accountant, Advanced – Accounting Services
Dept. jcarus@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Mary Pavlick, Financial Program Supv – Bursar
Dept. mpavlick@busssvc.wisc.edu
 - Carla Raatz, Senior Special Assistant – Office of Human Resources (Emeritus) craatz@ohr.wisc.edu
 - Julie Karpelena, Assistant Vice Chancellor, VCRGE Human Resources julie.karpelena@wisc.edu