

**AD HOC GRADUATE STIPEND WORKGROUP
FAU GRADUATE COLLEGE
WORKING NOTES SUMMARY**

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDATION	FUNDING NEEDED	TIMELINE
1. Graduate Student Health Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full or partial health insurance provided on an opt-in basis for all GA, GTA, and GRA positions. Appoint a committee to research and approve a health insurance plan. If funds are available, Aetna insurance could be provided for FY 2017/18. 	Estimated recurring funds at \$2,000/year for each graduate student that opts-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Planning Committee Spring 2018: Pilot roll-out Fall 2018: Fully implemented
2. Classification of Graduate Students- (stipends vs hourly pay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Term Stipend: GTA, GRA, and GA positions are the only classifications eligible for tuition waivers and require a term stipend. Hourly Stipend: Graduate Student Workers (GSW) are not eligible for tuition benefits and require an hourly rate. 	Recurring funds for full-time staff member to oversee classification compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Pilot roll-out Spring 2018: Fully implemented
3. Compensation of Graduate Students – (University minimum stipend)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doctoral: minimum of \$7,500/term stipend (\$15,000/year). Master's: minimum of \$5,000/term stipend (\$10,000/year). Hiring departments can exceed the University wide minimum. 	Estimated recurring funds of \$950,000/year (Fall/Spring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 1, 2018: Fully implemented
4. Competitiveness of Graduate Stipends – (college minimum stipend based on benchmarks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges establish minimum stipends by CIP codes and degree levels that are competitive with national benchmarks and University wide minimum (see # 3.). Colleges establish a three year plan for implementing stipend increases. 	To be determined by colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Minimum stipends established Fall 2018: Begin Implementation Fall 2020: Fully implemented (suggested three year rollout)
5. Holiday Bonuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A \$750 - \$1,000 bonus is recommended in FY 2017-2018 for all GA, GRA, and GTA positions. Based on the awards from #3 above, the bonuses may be higher for students that did not receive a base adjustment. 	Estimated \$750,000-\$1.5 Million for FY 2017/2018.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Funds distributed
6. Graduate Student Letters of Intent/Offer Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institute the standardization of letters of intent and offer letters with specific language for GRA, GTA and GA positions in Workday. Appoint a committee to research, develop, and approve templates (college deans, legal team, and Graduate College members). 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Planning Committee Spring 2018: Pilot roll-out Fall 2018: Fully Implemented
7. Graduate Student Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a working group to study housing costs for GA, GTA, and GRA positions. Create a detailed brochure on graduate student housing. 	Unknown- pending a decision from the working group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Research/Study Spring 2018: Possible implementation
8. Graduate Student Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a website and brochure that details the benefits of fees paid by graduate students. Include graduate student representation on fee committees. 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017: Working group Spring 2018: Fully implemented

***Please note, this summary was created by an unofficial ad hoc workgroup interested in providing recommendations on funding initiatives for FAU graduate students in order to align with FAU's Strategic Plan for the Race to Excellence.**

**AD HOC GRADUATE STIPEND WORKGROUP
FAU GRADUATE COLLEGE
WORKING NOTES**

Purpose:

In recent years, there have been several efforts to research benchmarks and best practices for Graduate Assistant stipends, health insurance and other ways of making FAU graduate programs competitive and to better align with FAU's Strategic Plan for the Race to Excellence.

The Graduate Stipend Working Group (an ad hoc working group charged by the Provost) met weekly from mid-June to mid-July to research and discuss current issues and to address how funds may be allocated FY 17-18, should they be available. The areas of focus of the group have been: stipends (equity and bonus); graduate student insurance; and other issues (such as offer letters, systems, etc.).

Graduate Stipend Working Group Members:

Graduate College

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Draft Recommendations/Consensus notes:

Thus far, the group has reached consensus about the following:

1. Graduate Student Health Insurance

Problem/Challenge: FAU does not offer graduate students receiving tuition waivers any health insurance as a benefit of their employment. Our research shows evidence that most universities in the SUS offer insurance to graduate student employees. Without health insurance as a benefit, FAU offers may not be able compete with offers from other SUS institutions. Competitive packages are a goal of the current strategic plan.

A. FAU should work toward a goal of providing health insurance coverage for Graduate Assistants (GTA, GRA, GA) receiving tuition waivers.

- 1) Recommend an “opt-in” program whereby health insurance would be offered to qualifying graduate students, but only if students “opt-in” for the coverage.
- 2) Recommend working toward inclusion in the Florida state-wide graduate student insurance pool for more affordable rates.
- 3) If the University decides to offer graduate students insurance immediately (Fall 2017), the only immediate option is the current AETNA program offered to all students.
- 4) If FAU decides that covering 100% of the insurance cost is not fiscally feasible, then an option may be to provide a specific dollar amount for qualified graduate students to use to purchase insurance through a university plan offered. This is a model used by some universities, including Texas A&M. Florida International University provides 75% coverage.
- 5) If a student does not “opt-in” for the health insurance benefit, the value of the benefit will not be added to increase the stipend.
- 6) If funding is allocated for student health insurance, it is recommended that the processes for selecting the insurance be expanded and include the Graduate College, Provost’s Office, Human Resources, OIT, and Student Affairs/Health Services.
- 7) It is recommended that a committee is appointed to approve an insurance plan in Fall 2017, a pilot health insurance plan is rolled out in Spring of 2018 and fully implemented by Fall 2018.
- 8) If funds are available, Aetna insurance could be provided for FY 2017/18.

2. Classification of Graduate Students – GTA, GRA, GA, Graduate Student Worker (stipends vs hourly Pay)

Problem/Challenge: Although FAU has a posted definition of the classifications of the four types of employment for graduate students, the classifications are not tracked in Workday and many students are incorrectly classified. It is important to ensure that all graduate students who assume jobs in one of these four areas are properly classified.

- A. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA), Graduate Research Assistants (GRA) and Graduate Assistants (GA)** are the only classifications eligible for tuition waivers (and the insurance benefit, should it become available in the future). Position descriptions and work assigned for these three positions must meet the criteria for professionalism and the tuition benefits policy. Further, any GA (non-teaching or research) must be in compliance with the tuition benefits policy and be reviewed for alignment with the strategic plan and University priorities. GTA, GRA and GA positions are not to be used for typical office and clerical functions; rather the Graduate Student Worker (GSW) may be employed for these purposes.

- B. **GRA, GRA, and GA positions** should all be moved toward **semester stipends** and not paid on an hourly basis; although employment outside the stipend period may be compensated via other means, such as OPS hourly wages.
- C. **Graduate Student Workers (GSW)** will be employed as OPS and paid on an **hourly basis**. These positions are not eligible for tuition waivers. GSW workers may perform duties outside their field of study, such as assisting with clerical office functions.
- D. Recurring funds for full-time staff member to oversee classification compliance may be needed.

3. Compensation of Graduate Students – (University minimum stipend of \$7,500/term for doctoral students and \$5,000/term for masters students)

Problem/Challenge: Since hiring units determine compensation and they also issue offer letters to GTA, GRA, GA and GSW positions, it is very difficult to ascertain the exact compensation paid to students in each of these categories. Further, the University does not have minimum university wide stipend levels for masters and doctoral students. To be competitive, FAU must establish a university wide minimum stipends for masters and doctoral students. Additionally, academic colleges are challenged to benchmark their minimums with competitors (See #4 below).

Efforts to seek comparison data from sources such as Oklahoma State University have been minimally successful since OSU averages masters and doctoral student stipends which is not useful to FAU for comparison. OSU does, however, provide stipend data by CIP code.

- A. **FAU needs to establish a university wide minimum semester stipend for masters and doctoral students.**
 - The doctoral stipend should be more than the master's stipend.
 - The suggested minimum stipend rate is \$7,500 per term for doctoral students (\$15,000 per year not including the summer term) and \$5,000 per term for master's students (\$10,000 per year not including the summer term).
 - This should be a priority for implementation as soon as possible. We recommend an implementation date of January 1, 2018. Of course, hiring units may go above this minimum, but they cannot hire a GTA, GRA or GA receiving a waiver below the minimum. The minimum stipend rates should also include rates for $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$ appointments.
- B. **FAU needs to work toward Instituting a standard salary range (minimum, midpoint, maximum) for GTA, GRA, and GA stipends by:**
 - Degree level (doctoral students paid at a higher rate than master's)
 - NSF, NIH, and other national stipend benchmarks
 - SUS benchmarks
 - Strategic programs or special programs that align with the FAU Strategic Plan and BOG metrics
- C. **A top priority should be to ensure that all graduate students receiving waivers also receive stipends that are AT LEAST at the minimum set as a university-wide requirement (\$7,500/term for doctoral and \$5,000/term for master's students)**

This is especially important for **doctoral students (GTA and GRA)** and **masters students serving as GTA's**. Additionally, academic colleges are challenged to benchmark their minimums with competitors (See #4 below).

4. Competitiveness of Graduate Stipends- (college minimum stipends based on benchmarks)

Problem/Challenge: In addition to a university wide minimum stipend (detailed in #3), colleges should research national benchmarks for their specific programs to set college minimums for competitive recruitment. The college minimums should be equal to or higher than the university wide minimum.

- A. Colleges should establish minimum stipends by degree levels that are competitive with national benchmarks and are equal to or greater than the University minimum of \$5,000/term for master's students and \$7,500/term for doctoral students. The benchmark research should be completed by Fall 2017.
- B. Colleges should establish a three year plan for implementing stipend increases to meet the established minimum.
- C. More information and data are needed to completely address this issue, but it is that that full implementation of competitive stipends will require a multi-year approach.

5. Holiday bonuses for GTA, GRA and GTA positions receiving tuition waivers

Problem/Challenge: If the Merit Bonus program is approved for university employees in 2017-2018, it is recommended that all GTAs, GRAs, and GAs also receive a bonus. In order to distribute bonuses correctly, graduate student classifications must be reconciled (#2). A \$750 - \$1,000 bonus is recommended for all students properly classified as GTA, GRA, and GA in FY 2017/2018.

- A. The bonuses distributed in Fall 2016 were well received and we recommend that practice be continued again in 2017, if possible.
- B. A \$750- \$1,000 bonus is recommended in FY 2017/2018 for all students properly classified under GTA, GRA, and GA classifications.

6. Graduate Student Letters of Intent/Offer Letters

Challenge/Problem: Currently hiring units (departments and faculty) issue their own offer letters for GTA, GA, and GRA positions. As a result, there is a great deal of inconsistency and a need for clarity. Varying start and end dates are not uncommon across departments, based on a limited number of offer letters reviewed at FAU. Our research shows that most universities provide templates and require standard language in all offer letters for GTA, GRA, and GA positions.

- A. Institute the standardization of offer letters with specific language for GRA, GRA and GA positions. Templates need to be updated and incorporated into the Workday processes.
- B. Appoint a committee to research, develop, and approve templates. The committee should be comprised of college deans, legal team, and Graduate College members).
- C. The Graduate College and the Provost's Office will provide leadership the development of the offer of intent, offer letters and other templates. Legal department should review these templates before

implementation.

- D. Language in offer letters should include terms (renewable), conditions, reporting and oversight, training required, benefits (waivers, but not fees), statement about benefits of being a full-time student (recreation membership, etc.)
- E. The Provost's Office, along with the Graduate Dean, Deans and others, will ensure these letters are unique to programs, while also providing necessary information for clarity and consistency.

7. Graduate Student Housing

Challenge/Problem: Currently graduate students who prefer to live on campus must live in residence halls with undergraduate students. Additionally, student housing costs are high in proportion to current GA, GTA, and GRA stipends.

- A. Establish a working group to study housing costs for GA, GTA, and GRA positions Establish dedicated graduate student housing space.
- B. Create a detailed brochure on graduate student housing.

8. Graduate Student Fees

Challenge/Problem: Graduate students may not be aware of the benefits and services they receive as a result of paying fees. Establishing a website and brochure to explain these benefits and services could be used as a recruitment tool.

- A. Develop a website and brochure that details the benefits and services graduate students received as a result of paying fees.
- B. Include graduate student representation on fee committees.

The Graduate Stipend Working Group convened as an ad hoc internal advisory group regarding graduate stipends, benefits and other related matters about graduate students (especially those receiving waivers). Some of these recommendations do not require funding, but implementation of most will require funding. Should funding be available and the group needs to reconvene, all agreed to meet again if they may be of service. If reconvened, others may be added to the group, as needed. The final meeting of this ad hoc group was July 21, 2017.