

Faculty Senate



M2020.21.20 Motion to Approve Faculty Senate Recommendations for the Graduate School Master's Student GA Working Group

Originator: Executive Committee, Mihalis Golias, Melissa Janoske McLean

Whereas,

The Graduate School assembled a Master's Student GA Working Group of faculty and administrators to provide guiding principles and recommendations to the Provost about how to manage Graduate Assistantships for master's students starting in FY22.

Whereas,

A draft report of guiding principles and recommendations from the Master's Student GA Working Group was presented to the Senate on November 11, 2020.

Whereas,

Feedback from the Faculty Senate was sought by the Faculty Senate Representatives to the Graduate School Master's Student GA Working Group.

Be it resolved that,

The Faculty Senate approves of the attached document titled, "Graduate School Master's Student Working Group Faculty Senate Feedback" and recommends that the document be submitted to the Graduate School Master's Student GA Working Group for consideration.

Recipients:

Faculty Senate

Melissa Janoske McLean, Senate Representative to Graduate School Master's Student GA Working Group

Mihalis Golias, Senate Representative to Graduate School Master's Student GA Working Group

Agreement with Current Recommendations

- There is a massive waste with our GA funding, where GAs are mainly used to cover duties that should be covered by professional staff or undergraduate student workers.
- For Master's level GA positions, it needs to be established how such positions support research in the department and can be truthfully counted as research expenditures. In most cases, Master's GAs should be assigned to faculty who have research responsibilities and are supporting the university's drive to R1. If non-research faculty or staff need student assistance, paying a student to work at an hourly rate should be implemented by the department.
- There should be a limit for master's and PhD funding received from department/college funds.

Issues with Current Recommendations

- The policy might generally hurt and undermine the prestige of the MFA and other terminal master's degrees.
 - This is seen to be especially true with master's degrees that are professional degrees, such as the MFA and MArch. National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) has some language on this in their handbook.
 - Recruiting faculty will take a significant hit, as many come to work with graduate students and for their workload/work focus to reflect that
- Re: encouraging master's programs to essentially become recruiting grounds for PhD programs
 - A number of programs have a minimum amount of post-master's degree work experience that must exist before they can apply to a PhD program (ex: Social Work, which requires two years)
 - We have such a recruitment mechanism in the form of a "dual degree admission." Hope is that this pathway could be developed further in a manner that enhances the financial considerations.
- Guidance is missing for departments that do not have PhD programs and might face difficulties starting one (e.g., approval from THEC—how many programs will they be willing to approve in close succession? Plus issues with how long the THEC process takes)
- When offering financial aid to students "scholarship and work stipend" doesn't sound as good as "graduate assistantship."

- For the recommendation “While the cost of Masters GAs varies across departments, about 2 GA funded master’s student (at \$16k per Fall/Spring each) equal 1 staff member in salary. A combination of staff and GAs is beneficial” this is a statement that needs more scrutiny. Even if the “cost” is the same for 2 GAs at \$16K each is \$32K, but there is a ROI of \$2K/year per Master’s, whereas the workers “cost” additional funds for retirement, insurance, etc. Plus, there really are not a lot of staff in departments making less than \$32K/year.
- There is a massive and incorrect assumption that external funding opportunities are the same regardless of field of study/research. External funding is difficult to obtain in significant award amounts for certain areas (e.g., grants of \$10-20K annually are considered large/prestigious awards, which is not enough to cover GAs).

General Issues and Things to Consider

- For the OIR dashboard of the percentage of fee-paying master’s students, there should also be a column for where the support comes from (department, grant, or other), as support might come from another department or program on campus, and provide misleading numbers.
- Graduation rates for department-funded GA positions should also be tracked and reported.
- Deans need to be thoroughly educated on the final recommendations and determinations for GA positions at this university. There are many other considerations that are part of this overall approach to GA positions that need to be understood by all stakeholders. Otherwise, misguided decisions on GA allocations may be made in the future.
- Students pursuing master’s degrees are badly needed to help keep their departments running (ex: Music students who assist/perform in opera productions).