



OFFICE OF THE FACULTY COUNCIL
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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February 16, 2010

William Powers, Jr.
President
The University of Texas at Austin
MAI 400
Campus Mail Code: G3400

Dear President Powers:

Enclosed for your information is a resolution to raise the minimum student academic employee salaries to a standard consistent with a living wage for Austin (D 7847-7849). The resolution was endorsed by the Faculty Council at its meeting on February 15, 2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Alexander Greninger".

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty and Faculty Council

Enclosure

SAG:dlr

xc: Steven Leslie, provost
Charles Roeckle, deputy to the president
Janet Staiger, 2009-10 Faculty Council chair
Harold H. Zakon, 2009-10 Responsibilities, Rights, and Welfare of Graduate Student
Academic Employees Committee chair
Andrea Gore, 2009-10 FCEC member and Faculty Welfare Committee member

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**RESOLUTION TO THE FACULTY COUNCIL TO RAISE MINIMUM GRADUATE
STUDENT ACADEMIC EMPLOYEE SALARIES TO A STANDARD CONSISTENT WITH
A LIVING WAGE FOR AUSTIN, TEXAS**

Professor Harold Zakon (neurobiology) submitted the following resolution on behalf of the Responsibilities, Rights, and Welfare of Graduate Student Academic Employees Committee recommending an increase for graduate student academic employees' salaries. The resolution will be voted on by the Faculty Council at its meeting on February 15, 2010. The secretary has classified this resolution as *general* legislation.



Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The Faculty Council and General Faculty

**RESOLUTION TO THE FACULTY COUNCIL TO RAISE MINIMUM GRADUATE
STUDENT ACADEMIC EMPLOYEE SALARIES TO A STANDARD CONSISTENT WITH
A LIVING WAGE FOR AUSTIN, TEXAS**

Resolution

We recognize and appreciate the contributions of the thousands of graduate teaching assistants and research assistants at The University of Texas at Austin. Graduate teaching assistants play a critical role in the education of tens of thousands of students, and the research assistants are instrumental in supporting the research mission of the university. These students enhance the academic reputation and rankings of the university. In order for us to continue to recruit and retain the best students to fill these positions, we believe that all graduate teaching and research assistants should receive a nine-month salary that meets or exceeds living wage estimates for the city of Austin, Texas, and is competitive with salaries offered at our peer institutions. In this resolution, we endorse the allocation of funds to increase minimum salaries for graduate teaching and research assistants. We further assert that this increase in minimum salaries must not lead to a reduction in the number of positions, as this would compromise the teaching and research mission of the university; rather, we support better funding for the positions that currently exist.

Endorsement, Background and Rationale

This resolution has been reviewed and endorsed by the Responsibilities, Rights, and Welfare of Graduate Student Academic Employees Committee (C-12). A similar living wage resolution has been endorsed by the Graduate Assembly Administrative Committee.

For the purposes of this resolution, "stipend" is defined as income before taxes such as gross salary.¹ The living wage stipend for one adult in Austin is \$1590 per month (or \$14,310 for 9 months). Increasing the minimum graduate student academic employee stipends to a living wage would make us competitive with our peer institutions, which have an average minimum stipend of \$14,412 for 9 months.

The C-12 committee began to research graduate student academic employee stipends at the urging of faculty members across campus who asserted that current stipends do not allow our students to

maintain an acceptable living standard. This jeopardizes recruitment and retention of outstanding students. Further, our graduate-student employees often need to accumulate substantial debt to subsidize their stipends or, procure additional employment, which can interfere with or prolong their studies.

Teaching assistants at UT-Austin: The average 9-month stipend for a half-time TA (20 hours/week) is \$13,889, or approximately \$1544 per month. The full range for these stipends reported by UT-Austin in October of 2009 was \$8,797-\$18,639 (or \$977-\$2,071 per month).²

Graduate research assistants at UT-Austin: The average 9-month stipend for a half-time GRA is \$8,369 or approximately \$929 per month after deducting tuition (this employment category is not automatically granted a tuition remission and the cost of resident tuition is estimated at \$6938). The full range for these stipends reported by UT-Austin in October of 2009 was \$9000-\$24,669 *before* tuition payment; thus if tuition is not covered by a grant award, college or department funds, this range of stipends is further reduced.

Living wage in Travis County: According to the Poverty in America Project at Penn State, a living wage for Travis County, Texas is \$19,086 per year for one adult (or \$1590 per month). Many of our students – particularly our GRAs – are currently salaried below minimally acceptable living standards. Further, this estimate for a minimum living wage does not take into account 1) that Austin is one of the more expensive cities in Travis County, 2) the earned degrees and existing job skills that graduate students bring to the university exceed those of the average citizen, 3) many students are supporting dependents and in some cases are the sole breadwinner, and 4) these statistics estimate that annual taxes are only \$220.

Stepping out from the poverty standards framework, it is possible to calculate a living wage using data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R). According to that office, the fair market value for a one-bedroom apartment in Austin, Texas in 2010 will be \$783/month. Using the 30% of income standard that applies to federal housing policy, \$783 is 30% of a monthly income of \$2610, an amount well above the \$929-\$1544 stipends for our current student employees. Indeed, even if we were to assume that all graduate student employees share rent with a roommate, covering half of the \$783 rent would require \$1305 per month using this same formula. However, this is not a safe assumption to make given the diversity of our graduate students in terms of life stage and family status.

Compared to peer institutions (see Table 1), UT-Austin stipends are on the lower end of the spectrum for stipend ranges. That is, UT-Austin's minimum stipends are much lower than our peers' minimum stipends. This is particularly notable because 47% of UT-Austin's TAs and many more GRAs are paid stipends below \$14,310. The \$14,310 amount, which represents a living wage in Travis County, is more in line with the minimum stipends offered by our peer institutions and which (aside from GRAs at IU-Bloomington) start at \$12,159 across TAs and GRAs and average \$14,412. The peer institution data in Table 1 were gathered through the Chronicle of Higher Education Website. UT data came from the university's Office of Information Management and Analysis.

It should also be noted that these peer institutions all reported tuition remission across TA and GRA appointments. As noted above, UT-Austin does not grant tuition remission uniformly across GRAs.

Table 1: Range of 9-month average salaries for grad student employees at 50% appointment

	<u>Teaching Asst.</u>	<u>Research Asst.</u>
UCLA	16,632-19,503	12,159-23,832 ³
Indiana University-Bloomington	14,092-20,521	9,247-18,749
Michigan State University	12,957-15,914	13,201-16,503

University of Michigan	15,999	14,947-17,732
UNC-Chapel Hill	14,489-18,312	14,700-17,958
University of Washington-Seattle	14,391-22,824	14,391-17,118
University of Wisconsin	12,894-15,477	16, 506
University of Texas at Austin⁴	8,798-18,639	9,000-24,669

There is little or no positive side to fostering an underpaid graduate student workforce.⁵ As a community of scholars, our research and our scholarship is very often only as good as the graduate students we recruit. Our research/scholarship will excel to the extent that we can attract very high quality graduate students who have the ability to make our ideas come to life and who will bring great ideas of their own to the table. The reputation and rankings of the University of Texas are therefore directly and inextricably tied to the quality of our graduate students. By continuing to offer stipend levels that substantially fail to provide a minimal livable wage and that significantly undercut our peer institutions, we directly encourage the best and brightest talent to go elsewhere. Addressing these inequities by setting reasonable minimal standards will have significant and tangible positive benefits for the University.

¹ Salary does not reflect the value of tuition benefit (where offered) or fringe benefits such as health insurance.

² Although not under the purview of this resolution, we call attention to other categories of employees (e.g., assistant instructors) whose salaries should also be adjusted commensurate with this recommendation.

³ Research assistants with relevant experience or a Master's cannot be paid less than 14,526 at UCLA

⁴ Unlike the peer institutions above, UT does not remit tuition for GRAs, which decreases the UT stipends for those students further.

⁵ Although beyond the scope of the resolution, we also recognize a need for equitable and comprehensive health-care benefits for all graduate students, and emphasize that the living wage should accommodate any additional costs of these benefits. Further, other categories of graduate student employees should be considered for similar and equitable adjustments.

Sources

The Chronicle of Higher Education (2010). Report on Stipends for Graduate Assistances 2008-2009. <http://chronicle.com/stats/stipends/>

The Pennsylvania State University (2010). Poverty in America: Living wage calculator for Travis County, Texas. <http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/counties/48453>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R). <http://www.hud.gov/>

University of Texas at Austin, Office of Information Management and Analysis (2010). Graduate Student Stipends for National Comparison Group 2007-2009.