

Associated Students of Western Washington University
Board of Directors

A Resolution Regarding GA Compensation and Fee Schedule at WWU
March 2019

Graduate Assistants, GAs, (Research Assistants and Teaching Assistants) stipends have been stagnant since the 2014-2015 academic year. Since 2014-2015 WWU-wide imposed fees have increased ~28%, excluding the S&A Fee which is included with a GA tuition waiver, while cost of living (COL) has increased ~21% to date, using the average rent for a Whatcom County 1-BD apartment as a benchmark (2018 Board of Trustees Report) (UW Runstad Department of Real Estate). This does not include additional departmentally imposed fees, which for some graduate programs are thousands of additional dollars per year (2018-19 WWU Budget Office).

For example, a Traditional MBA student pays about \$748 in MBA specific department fees and \$365 in University-wide imposed fees, for a total just shy of \$1,113 per quarter (2018-19 WWU Budget Office). A full-time GA makes \$3,960 a quarter, therefore a Traditional MBA GA automatically loses 28% of their income for the quarter just to cost of attendance fees, this does not include the cost of books and supplies, another estimated \$308/quarter (The Graduate School) (2018-19 WWU Financial Aid Office). That means after a Traditional MBA GA pays their fees and buys supplies, they have spent an estimated 36% of their income for the quarter, with about \$2500 left to support oneself for the next three months in a city that just keeps getting more expensive to live in. Graduate Students pay different departmental fee rates, but this example paints a picture of how much income GAs are really taking home, how the amount of take-home income has decreased since 2014, and how realistic it is for GAs to pay their living expenses without taking a loan out and/or finding additional work.

This has created a tremendous financial burden for GAs and is positively correlated with, reduced quality of work, poor mental health, delayed or failure to graduate, etc. (2016-17 WWU Graduate Survey). GAs play a vital role in the University's ecosystem, providing research, mentorship, instruction, leadership, WWU graduate program advocacy for prospective students, value, reputation, and most importantly undergraduate support and inspiration. It is estimated over 9,155 undergraduate enrollments receive GA support Winter Quarter 2018 (2019 Departmental Survey).

Without compensation commensurate with the value GAs present to the university, and appropriate measures in place to ensure stipends match the COL and increase in admission fees as described above, GAs cannot perform their duties to their full potential; this is hurtful to stakeholders across the University.

WHEREAS the ASWWU Board of Directors is a recognized voice for all students of the university; and

WHEREAS on January 28th, 2019 the Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC) requested graduate students to comment on Sabah's *Moving Forward in 2019* blog if they felt that the financial concerns of graduate students and GAs were not being addressed by WWU. Over 50 respondents replied to the blog with anecdotal but detailed arguments explaining specific ways in which WWU is not fulfilling their obligations to adhere to the goals outlined in the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan and how this impacts graduate student education, contribution on campus, and wellbeing; and

WHEREAS The President's Office replied on Thu, 02/07/2019 in a public statement "the comments and concerns that you and so many other graduate assistants in this thread have expressed are greatly appreciated. While this issue has been raised in the past, and various funding proposals put forth, Western is committed to start addressing it in the next fiscal year..." and committed to "...make sure that there are opportunities for graduate student representatives to be involved in the planning process during spring 2019."; and

WHEREAS the 2018-2025 WWU Strategic Plan stipulates in Goal #1 that "Western will provide a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity", and in subsection C WWU commits to: "Increase support and infrastructure for all types of scholarship, research, and creative activity"; and

WHEREAS the 2018-2025 WWU Strategic Plan stipulates in Goal #3 that "Western will foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly" and in subsection A, B, D, and E WWU commits to: "Strengthen shared governance to ensure that students, staff, and faculty are meaningfully empowered in the university's policies, decisions, and direction", "Support student, staff, and faculty wellbeing, including physical health and wellness, mental health, and disability resources based on universal design", "Improve climate and working conditions for student employees, staff, and faculty at all locations", and "Provide competitive compensation and professional development for student employees, staff, and faculty"; and

WHEREAS the 2018-2025 WWU Strategic Plan stipulates in Goal #4 that "Western will pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts" and in subsection B, C, and E WWU commits to: "Establish, fund and sustain practices of self-examination and continuous improvement to identify, understand, and remediate structural injustices and inequities at Western", "Recruit, retain, and support more underrepresented and first-generation students at the undergraduate and graduate levels", and "**Increase affordability of and access to high quality undergraduate and graduate education at all Western's locations**"; and

WHEREAS the 2018-2025 WWU Strategic Plan stipulates in their *Benchmarks of Success* a goal of 19%-28% in increased degrees awarded to graduate students by the 2024-2025 academic year; and

WHEREAS Western's priorities during the 2019 Legislative Session has three key priorities the upcoming 2019-2021 biennial budget; one, being "Competitive compensation for faculty and

staff: In order to retain and attract high quality faculty and staff Western has requested \$15.3 million to fully fund negotiated contracts with classified staff and to provide a 4% per year compensation increase for all faculty and professional staff” but this goal/request leaves out GAs who have not seen a compensation increase for over five years; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors formally endorses the Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC) Stipend & Fee Subcommittee’s recommendation to increase stipends for GAs to reflect fee and cost of living increases over the last five years, the last time stipends were increased (2014).

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors commits to collaborating alongside Western administration to begin the process of creating a mechanism to review and increase stipends instep with graduate student cost of attendance fees (WWU) and cost of living expenses for Bellingham. Such as, a committee that annually reviews GA stipends and provides a recommendation to the University’s Budget Committee(s) and Board of Trustees.

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors commits to collaborating alongside Western administration to begin the process of discussing a way to relieve GA fee burden at the beginning of the quarter. Such as, allowing GAs to pay their fees over the quarter with monthly payments or deferral until the end of the quarter, and/or have scholarships and emergency funding reserved for GAs who are struggling to pay their way.

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors commits to doing everything in their power to ensure that graduate students have a voice on all WWU student matters, including assisting in reserving a graduate student representative seat on student committees and advisory boards when applicable.

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors commits to doing everything in their power to ensure that GAs are fairly compensated for the work and vital contribution they provide to Western Washington University.

BE IT RESOLVED, the 2018-2019 ASWWU Board of Directors commits to doing everything in their power to ensure that graduate students are recognized and appreciated for the work they do at Western Washington University and the tremendous value they add.

BE IT RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be distributed via email to President Sabah Randhawa, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services Melynda Huskey, Dean of Graduate School and Vice Provost of Research Gautam Pillay, Associate Dean of the Graduate School Michael Barr, and the graduate WWU student body.

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