

**The Graduate Student Assembly
The University of Texas at Austin**

Sponsors: Samantha Fuchs, GSA President
Kathryn Abercrombie, GSA Legislative Affairs Director

Resolution: G.R. 19 (S) 3 – Resolution to Support Graduate Student Financial Needs and Transparency on the Graduate Education Task Force

Executive Summary: The Graduate Education Task Force was created at the start of Spring 2019. The goal of this task force is to organize the internal redistribution of funds at department/program levels in order to provide for the financial wellness of graduate students employed at the University of Texas at Austin. The task force has been funded with an initial infusion of cash, \$10 million for the first three years of implementation, to be followed by future funds of undecided amounts. Current minimum wages for hourly students have not kept track with the inflating cost of living in Austin, TX. This resolution expresses support for outcomes of the task force to include encouraging at least a \$20,000/year salary or stipend for graduate student employees and that transparent budget reallocation within departments to be accountable to the Office of the Provost and the graduate student body. This resolution also seeks that this increase in salaries come from increased recurring funds not lead to a reduction in the number of positions of students, staff, or faculty.

FAQs:

Q: If the Graduate Education Task Force is already deliberating, why is this legislation needed?

A. The Task Force will not have enforceable outcomes, only recommendations. This legislation calls for the distribution of transition funding to only be issued to departments that provide public plans on how to follow the guidelines.

Q: Why is the goal a minimum stipend/salary \$20,000 per year? That is a large increase compared to students who make only \$10,000.

A. A living wage for one adult in Travis County is \$26,125 per year as of 2019.¹ Despite being a large jump for many programs with low stipends, the increase to \$20,000 still does not reach the living wage. This also corresponds to a \$15,000 stipend for the 9-month academic year, which many students receive.

¹ “Living Wage Calculator.” MIT. <http://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/12420>

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WHEREAS (1): Graduate student employees at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) perform essential tasks and responsibilities that are necessary for the function of the University. Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) and assistant instructors (AIs) serve the University by monitoring classes, leading laboratory or discussion sections, grading, giving lectures, holding office hours, managing administrative tasks, and more, for faculty and student support.^{2,3} Graduate Assistants (GA) serve administrative functions, Academic assistants help with class grading and clerical work, and Tutors directly assist students in need.⁴ Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) conduct research across many disciplines⁵ that generate research grants which bring in 47% of the total University budget⁶; and,

WHEREAS (2): Austin, TX is the fastest-growing large city in the country.⁷ The city of Austin cost of living has dramatically increased in recent years without adequate options for affordable housing for all residents of the city, including students^{8,9}; and,

WHEREAS (3): The cost of an average 1-bedroom apartment in Austin rose by 8.9% from 2008 to 2013.¹⁰ Graduate student teaching assistants received a \$0.20/hr raise (+1.7%) in 2013, or +\$17.30/month for a 20-hour appointment.¹¹ The cost of an average 1-bedroom

² “Teaching Assistants.” (2006). Handbook of Operating Procedures 9-2020. The University of Texas at Austin University Policy Office. <https://policies.utexas.edu/policies/teaching-assistants>

³ “Assistant Instructors.” (2011). Handbook of Operating Procedures 9-2010. The University of Texas at Austin University Policy Office. <https://policies.utexas.edu/policies/assistant-instructors>

⁴ “Academic Assistants, Assistants, and Tutors.” (2013). Handbook of Operating Procedures 9-2010. The University of Texas at Austin University Policy Office. <https://policies.utexas.edu/policies/academic-assistants-assistants-and-tutors>

⁵ “Graduate and Undergraduate Research Assistants.” (2013). Handbook of Operating Procedures 9-2010. The University of Texas at Austin University Policy Office. <https://policies.utexas.edu/policies/graduate-and-undergraduate-research-assistants>

⁶ “Sources of Revenue.” The University of Texas at Austin. <https://tuition.utexas.edu/learn-more/sources-of-revenue>

⁷ O’Donnell, Amanda. “Austin is the No. 1 fastest-growing large city in the country, list says.” 2 Oct 2018. *Statesman*. <https://www.statesman.com/news/20181002/austin-is-no-1-fastest-growing-large-city-in-country-list-says>

⁸ Cantu, Tony. “Austin ‘Cost to Live Comfortably’ Increase is Highest in Nation.” 10 Dec 2018. <https://patch.com/texas/downtownaustin/austin-cost-live-comfortably-increase-highest-nation>

⁹ Brown, Lisa. “Affordable Housing Reaches Crisis Level in Austin.” 17 Sept 2018. <https://www.globest.com/2018/09/17/affordable-housing-reaches-crisis-levels-in-austin/?slreturn=20190209211747>

¹⁰ “Fair Market Rents.” (2019). Office of Policy Development and Research. Housing and Urban Development. *huduser.gov*. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html>

¹¹ Email correspondence with UT Austin Human Resources.

apartment in Austin rose by 22.6% from 2013 to 2018.¹² Graduate student employment compensation has not changed in that time; and,

WHEREAS (4): A living wage for one adult in Travis Country is \$26,125 per year¹³, which very few departments provide; and,

WHEREAS (5): The Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) distributed a survey in Spring 2018 with 694 respondents from all 15 colleges and schools.¹⁴ In this survey, 63% of graduate students reported spending more than 40% of their income on rent and utilities. Approximately 40% of students work second jobs in addition to their graduate student positions to support their basic needs and, in some cases, the needs of their families; and,

WHEREAS (6): International students are ineligible for employment outside of UT Austin due to the conditions of their visa and rely entirely on UT Austin positions for their income; and

WHEREAS (7): The Tuition Reduction Benefit (TRB) is set by the University Budget Council is a partial tuition waiver for graduate student employees. It currently has a maximum value of \$1,892 per semester.¹⁵ As such, the TRB does not cover the full cost of tuition and graduate student employees must cover the remainder of the cost. UT Austin Deans and students have expressed frustration with the lack of clarity around current TRB processes and low levels of funding; and,

WHEREAS (8): Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the country and our comparative cost index is poor compared to our peer institutions^{16,17}; and,

WHEREAS (9): The Graduate Education Task Force exists to optimize department spending, including graduate student stipends and compensation. It was granted a one-time infusion of \$10 million to support its goals and recommendations for the first three years of the Task Force's existence. The funding beyond the beginning three years will be determined based on progress and need. The Task Force consists of 6 Deans, 19 professors, 1 department chair, 2 graduate coordinators, and 2 graduate student representatives. However, the results of the Task Force's deliberation are merely guidelines, rather than enforceable changes; and,

WHEREAS (9): Because the task force cannot enforce or require any changes to current practices, it is important that the GSA express their additional support for graduate student workers and for the transparency of individual program allocation in order for departments to be accountable to their students and the University administration; now,

¹² Ibid "Fair Market Rents."

¹³ "Living Wage Calculator." MIT. <http://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/12420>

¹⁴ "Report from the Graduate Student Labor Conditions Committee." UT Austin Graduate Student Assembly. December 2018. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5NN-hG-RUGTd2k2WFJuN1JtWXpKemtYQ1hPaC1RVDIwOWtj/view?usp=sharing>

¹⁵ "Tuition Reduction Benefit." The Graduate School. University of Texas at Austin. <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/finances/student-employment/academic-employment/tuition-reduction-benefit>

¹⁶ PhD Stipends Survey Results. Database. <http://www.phdstipends.com/results>

¹⁷ Ibid, Report from the Graduate Student Labor Conditions Committee.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT (1): The GSA calls upon the Graduate Education Task Force to make recommendations to reallocate recurring funds within departments to increase minimum stipends and salaries for all graduate student employees to \$20,000/year (\$15,000/academic year) for a 20-hour appointment by 2023; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (2): The GSA calls upon the Graduate Education Task Force to make recommendations to the Office of the Provost, Office of the President, and Office of Budget Allocation to provide further recurring funding to in order to provide their graduate student employees with a living wage without cutting graduate programs or employment positions. Budget reallocation will only provide some of the funds necessary and the University must increase support to all programs to cover gaps without losing students; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (3): The Graduate Education Task Force, upon conclusion of regular meetings in December 2019, publishes their collected data full recommendations to the entire University body in January 2020 and the relevant departments hold a transparent revision of their internal budget, including the UT Austin general administration, with a published plan on how to follow the recommendations of the Task Force by September 2020; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (4): The Graduate Education Task Force employs the \$10 million in transition funding to immediately increase the salaries of graduate student workers upon condition of colleges providing a clear plan for internal budget reallocation to continue supporting graduate students at higher, livable salaries after the three year transition period. This will ensure recommendations are followed, without being an official requirement; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (5): The funds distributed by the University Budget Office to create the Tuition Reduction Benefit (TRB) be increased to match tuition levels so there is no gap; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (6): This resolution will be submitted to the Graduate Education Task Force, the Office of the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs, the Office of the Provost, the Office of the President, The Graduate Assembly, the Faculty Council, and *the Daily Texan*.

PASSED by the GSA Assembly on March 13, 2019.

Signature of the GSA President _____

