

February 1, 2023

Resolution to Increase Base-funding Stipends for Graduate Teaching and Research Assistantships

Whereas: The Graduate Council, while heartened by and grateful for the increase in the base level of stipends for graduate teaching and research assistants beginning in AY 22-23, renews its appeal to UM's administration to increase this compensation still further. Graduate students play an integral role in delivering high quality education at UM and in furthering the University's research profile. Although the previous increase was both highly necessary and unquestionably appreciated by faculty and graduate students, there is an urgent need for additional support to enable graduate students to succeed in their programs and to enable the University to deliver high-quality teaching and research, generate research expenditures, and validate and deepen its R1 status.

Whereas: The academic year (i.e. 2-semester) base salary for graduate assistants (GAs) at the University of Montana is \$10,000 for master's and \$16,000 for doctoral students. Unlike many universities, UM currently does NOT cover the costs of student fees or health care in GA stipends; these costs effectively reduce base-funded GA annual salaries. Currently, fees range between \$2,000-\$2,400 per year based on nine credits of enrollment and residency status; meanwhile, insurance premiums vary greatly depending on the chosen plan, but for some they reduce GA salaries by as much as \$4,000-5,000 per year.

Whereas: The current stipend levels create a competitive disadvantage for UM compared with other regional and R1 universities, and hinder UM's ability to attract highly qualified graduate students. Stipends are well below national averages, and in a 2022 Oklahoma State University study of 48 institutions reporting TA stipend information, the University of Montana ranked in the bottom 15-25%. The adverse effects of U.M.'s stipend levels are compounded by cost-of-living metrics (e.g., calculated by U.S. News and World Report) that recently determined Montana to rank as the 19th most expensive state in the country in which to live, and by soaring housing costs that situate Missoula, in particular, "on the cusp of a San Francisco-style affordability crisis."

Whereas: Mental health is a growing challenge for graduate students. A 2021 Graduate School survey on mental health reveals that graduate student stress is an appreciable problem at UM, and shows correlation between perceived stress and students' experience of financial threat. Increasing stipends will (1) help alleviate financial threat and associated stress; (2) reduce the need for students to seek additional employment, allowing them to fulfill their GA responsibilities and pursue their own academic endeavors at the highest levels; and (3) shorten time-to-completion and increase completion rates for graduate degrees.

Whereas: Prior to the AY21/22 increase, UM's base-funding rates for GA salaries at the Master's level had not increased in over 20 years. Base-salaries for PhD students were last increased 10 years ago but are still well below the national average. The continued evaluation of stipend levels remains pressingly urgent. Current GA wages: 1) are in conflict with UM's mission to provide an "accessible education" as graduate students are put in financially precarious situations; and 2) threaten the University's ability to provide high-quality teaching and research.

Therefore, let it be resolved that The Faculty Senate urges The University of Montana to:

- (1) Maintain or increase the current number of TA positions;
- (2) Augment the positive effects of the \$1,000 increase to TA base salaries last year by immediately raising these salaries again by an additional \$2,000 per year (with the MS/MA salary set at 80% of the PhD salary), effective AY 23/24, while establishing a phase-in plan designed to move TA stipends as

close as possible to the national average (e.g., with additional \$1,000 annual increases over multiple years).

(3) After AY23/24 provide regular cost of living increases in pay on the same schedule as increases in faculty and staff pay;

(4) In addition to tuition and super tuition, pay all required student fees and health insurance for TAs and require that grant-funded RAs include these fees and health, whenever possible; and

(5) Respond to this resolution in writing by March 17, 2023.