

October 20, 2015

**“A 1.75% increase in stipends starting only in January is unfair”
—Significant Development in Contract Negotiations
Between Graduate Assistants United and the University of Florida**

Gainesville, FL- Graduate Assistants United (GAU), the official labor union which represents around 4,000 graduate, teaching, and research assistants at the University of Florida (UF), is currently negotiating with the university about stipend increases and fee relief. Having bargained for more than 2 months, the university decided to offer a 1.75% stipend increase (effective in January, in contrast to last year’s 3.25 percent raise, which was retroactive to the beginning of the fall semester) and \$50 fee rebate.

Since August, GAU has been bargaining with UF administrators about this year’s collective bargaining agreement. GAU proposed a plan that would significantly narrow the significant gap between low-income and high-income GAs, promoting fairness and helping to lift many GAs out of poverty by making fees proportional to stipends. However, UF administrators proposed only a flat amount of \$50 for fee relief. When Kevin Funk, GAU Co-President, asked how this is going to promote equality, Bill Connellan, UF’s chief negotiator, argued that, “\$50 relief addresses equality.”

Full-time GAs who are appointed at 0.5 FTE (full-time equivalent, the way GAs’ workloads and stipends are calculated) and earn the minimum stipend of \$13,000 per academic year are required to pay at minimum \$1400 in student fees (\$1920 for 12-month appointments), which is about 10.77% (14.77%) of the minimum stipend. All full-time GAs pay the same amount in fees per semester, regardless of their salaries.

UF’s proposed 1.75% increase in stipends will exacerbate the income differences between GAs. While high-income GAs earning about \$40,000 per academic year will get an increase of \$700 due to the 1.75% increase, low-income GAs who earn the minimum of \$13,000 per academic year will only get an increase of \$227.50. The high-income GAs, therefore, will be better off from a percentage-based stipend raise compared to low-income GAs, thus widening the wage gap among GAs at UF.

GAU believes that a stipend increase of 1.75% is both unacceptably low and also unfair, as it exacerbates income inequality among hard-working GAs. “Clearly UF’s priorities do not involve addressing fairness and income inequality among GAs,” states Ioannis Ziogas, GAU’s Bargaining Chair.

In 2005 and 2006, UF charged graduate students \$39.01 per credit hour in fees. This year, fees are \$79.68 per credit hour, a 104% increase. Meanwhile, during this same period minimum stipends have increased from \$8000 to \$13,000, only a 62.5% increase.

About Graduate Assistants United (GAU)

UF Graduate Assistants United (GAU) is the official labor union that represents all Graduate Assistants at the University of Florida. Founded in 1972, GAU has been fighting to improve working conditions for GAs for over a generation. The organization negotiates a Collective Bargaining Agreement with the University of Florida that guarantees GA stipends, access to health care, personal leave days, due process, intellectual property rights, and more. UF-GAU is affiliated with the United Faculty of Florida, the Florida Education Association, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the AFL-CIO.

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