



**R1 DOCTORAL
UNIVERSITY**

Meet and Confer

College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences

Spring 2024



**GRADUATE
SCHOOL**



- Quick introduction
- Rules of proceeding
- Meet & Confer from Fall semester
 - GA stipends vs Cost of Living
 - Mandatory Fees
 - Advisor/Mentor-GA relationship
 - Insurance Related
- Meet & confer Survey Spring-2024 Results and Discussion
- Summary
- References



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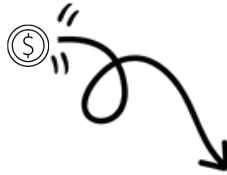
RB Berry

(They/Them)

Committee Member
Applied Sociology
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- **GAAC's intention:** Presentation of the concerns of GAs in good faith. Cooperation of the Grad School Division of Student Affairs and Department Chairs are requested.
- **Meeting minutes will be recorded to be made available to everyone.**
- **M&C Rules:**
 - GAAC did not hold elections for outside representation.
 - The administration can choose to not answer an inquiry in accordance with M&C rules.
 - The administration will have the final word in all decisions.
 - GAAC has the responsibility to inform GAs of the decisions resulting from these discussions in writing. However, administration can request discreet discussion regarding an agenda point

01**GA Stipend and
Mandatory Fees****Delays in Paychecks**

GAs have reported delays in bi-weekly paychecks and reimbursements in Fall GA town hall. This issue has been an issue since 2022.

02**Avisor/Mentor- GA
Relationship****COL vs inflation**

Insufficient COL increase compared to inflation in state of Maryland

03**GA insurance****Mandatory Fees**

Some students have to pay \$1500-\$1700 mandatory fee per semester.
Possibility of fixed amount charges.

04**GA Contract Issues**

01**GA Stipend and
Madatory Fees****02****Avisor/Mentor- GA
Relationship****03****GA insurance****04****GA Contract Issues****Lack of Support**

GAs are often don't get proper resolution on advisor/mentor issues. All the consequences are faced by GAs.

**No protection or prevention measurements**

Ineffectiveness in stopping advisors who exploit GAs.
No consequences or actions taken for the advisor.

01**GA Stipend and
Mandatory Fees****Lapses in GA health Insurance**

GAs have been experiencing lapses in between semesters in their health insurance.

02**Avisor/Mentor- GA
Relationship****No dependent Coverage**

Depended insurance has to be purchased by the GAs.

03**GA insurance****04****GA Contract Issues**



01

GA Stipend and Madatory Fees



02

Avisor/Mentor- GA Relationship



03

GA insurance



04

GA Contract Issues



GA responsibilities

Some student's haven't received the addendum listing clear set of requirements, list of expectations, responsibilities or list of duties with the appointment letter.

Count of In what Department / Office do you currently serve as a GA?

Summary of the Survey

- Total Responses: 98
 - Biology: 42
 - Physics: 29
 - Chemistry: 16
 - Chemistry and Biochemistry: 6
 - Mathematics and Statistics: 2
 - Statistics: 1
 - Other: 2

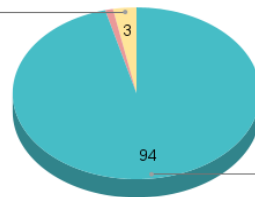
- All respondents were full time CNMS GAs.

- Main Concerns raised by CNMS Students:
 - Work and workload
 - Advisor/Mentor-GA relationship issues
 - Stipends and Mandatory Fees

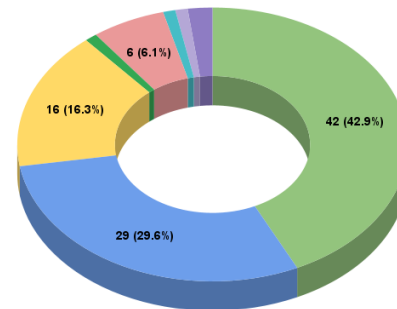
Degree Type. Eg: PhD, Masters, other

Masters

3.1%

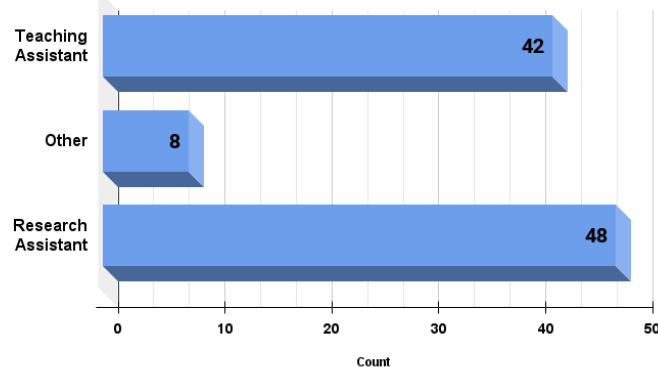

PhD

95.9%



● Biology
 ● Physics
 ● Chemistry
 ● CNMS
 ● Chemistry and Biochemistry
● G-RISE; Biological Sciences
 ● Statistics
 ● Mathematics and Statistics

GA position.



Concerns about Work and Workload

- CNMS students are consistently working beyond their 20 hour per week contracts.
- There is no requirement for a set list of expectations for GAs. Some student are requesting written agreements and required mentor training for new faculty for transparency and to avoid confusion.

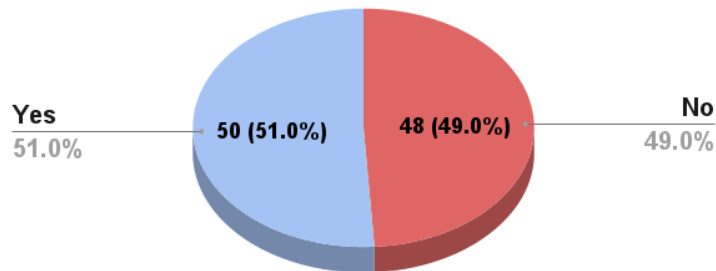
GA Handbook Section VII Letter of Appointment

➤ “This letter will provide information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

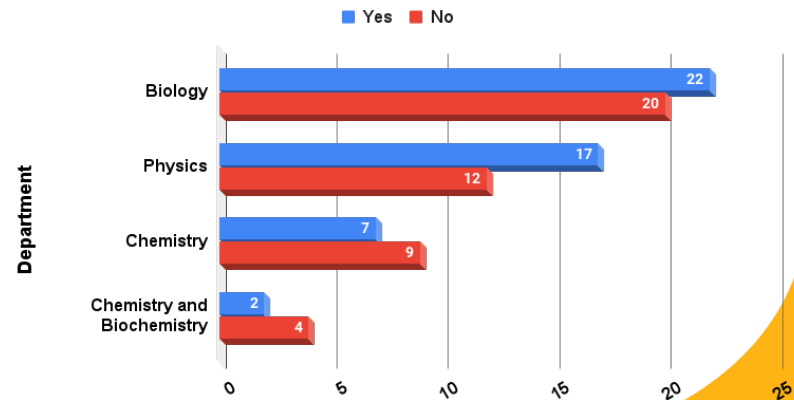
(d) The basic responsibilities.”

➤ “Responsibilities can either be outlined in the appointment letter or an addendum(to the appointment letter) and discussed with the GA in the expectations meeting.”

Count of Did you receive an Addendum (document enlisting your GA duties) along with your Spring 2023 GA



Did you receive an Addendum(doc enlisting your GA duties) along with your spring 2023 GA?



Concerns about Work and Workload: Suggestions from GAAC

- University administration in collaboration with the department leaders, can develop a standardize written agreement for GA appointment letter that outlines **GAs responsibilities, role, and expected workload** and make sure it is included in the appointment letters as mentioned in the GA handbook.
- GAAC suggest that faculty should receive a **mandatory training** that covers their responsibilities in supervising GAs, including setting clear expectations, provide adequate support and guidance, and adhering to contractual agreements.



PHYSICS PHD STUDENT

"As a research assistant it always seems weird we are only contracted to work 20 hours a week but expectations of work and the amount of work required to graduate on a reasonable timeline is significantly more than that (closer to 40 hours a week)"



CHEMISTRY PHD STUDENT

"How do we ensure that TAs are protected from being taken advantage of if there is no set list of expectations?"



BIOLOGY PHD STUDENT

"Generally, I feel as though advisors are able to treat students as they please. I'm fortunate to have a nice mentor, but I have wondered whether it would be possible for PIs to receive management training. Graduate students are an extremely vulnerable population, and we do not have an HR structure like companies do. Additionally, I have heard some senior graduate students express concerns about their PI "not letting them go," which is really concerning to me"

Concerns about Work and Workload

- Lack of accountability for faculty who mistreat students
- Some students feeling defeated and unheard by the University and their mentors

Concerns about Work and Workload: Suggestions from GAAC

- Establish clear policies and procedures outlining expectations for faculty behavior and consequences for mistreatment of students.
- Provide training for faculty who has been reported for GA exploitations on effective mentoring practices, conflict resolution, creating positive and supportive academic environment.

CHEMISTRY PHD STUDENT

"How are faculty being held accountable when they are reported for inappropriate behavior? (Creating a toxic work environment, Using disrespectful/inappropriate language, Failing to report incidents that have occurred, etc.)"

STATISTICS PHD STUDENT

"I have [concerns about my work/duties as a GA] but what is the point?"

Concerns about GA Stipends and Mandatory Fees

- CNMS GA stipends are too low relative to other schools, within departments, compared to local cost of living.
- Most prevalent concern is the cost of “mandatory fees”.

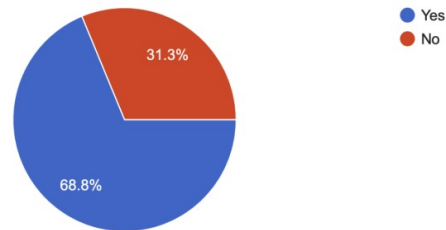
Most Physics Department GAs report skipping meals (69%), avoiding medical treatment (78%), and going without essential items (78%) due to insufficient finances.

(survey done by PGSA, 2022)

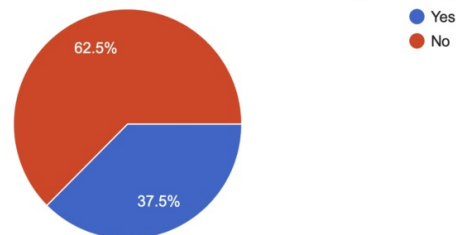
76% of Chemistry Department GAs can't afford to live by themselves, 58.1% can't afford to pay Semester fees, 51% avoid going to the doctor due to lack of money for a copay, 73.8% report living in substandard housing because it is all they can afford.

(survey done by CGSA, 2022)

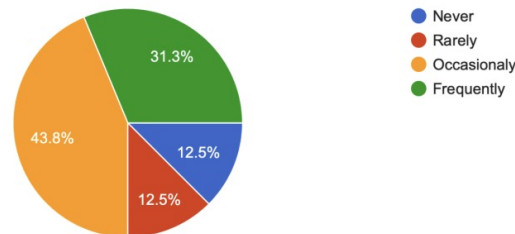
“Have you cut back on eating or skipped meals to save money while working as a graduate student at UMBC?”



“Are the semester fees affordable based on your salary?”



“How frequently (if at all) do you experience mental health issues, including anxiety or depression, related to your financial situation?”



Results from a 2022 PGSA survey

Concerns about GA Stipends and Mandatory Fees

Expenses	Per month	Per year
Food	\$ 367	\$ 4,405
Childcare	\$ 0	\$ 0
Housing	\$ 1,300	\$ 15,600
Utilities	\$ 180	\$ 2,160
Transportation	\$ 100	\$ 1200
Mandatory Fees	\$250	\$ 3000
Miscellaneous	\$ 325	\$ 3900
Civic	\$ 0	\$ 0
Total	\$ 2,522	30,265

Cost of Living in Baltimore, Maryland

▲ 8%

higher than national avg.

▲ 9%
HOUSING

▲ 5%
UTILITIES

▲ 14%
GROCERIES



MEDIAN RENT

\$1,496 / month



ENERGY BILL

\$184.78 / month



PHONE BILL

\$198.78 / month



GAS

\$3.43 / gallon



LOAF OF BREAD

\$4.40



GALLON OF MILK

\$2.76



CARTON OF EGGS

\$2.55



BUNCH OF BANANAS

\$3.81

Ref: [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) and [Payscale](#)

Minimum Stipends (Bi-Weekly Rate)

Full-time – \$ 806.20 [Dean of Natural & Math Science]

Part-time – \$ 411.16 [multiple department]

- COLA is 2%.
- Increase in expenses are larger than COLA adjustment.

Concerns about GA Stipends and Mandatory Fees : Suggestions from GAAC

- Utilize unused tuition remission to cover mandatory fees/dependent insurance coverage after PhD students' complete courses.
- Suggesting a two fixed mandatory fees for full-time and part-time students instead of current system
- Is it possible to get a stipend increase with the budget negotiations with the state of Maryland ?

NEROSCIENCE PHD STUDENT

"Fees - why are graduate students on a stipend required to pay fees when most comparable schools do not burden their graduate students with them, and why also why are the fees taken AFTER taxes (my first year of fees cost ~3600 or ~13% of my stipend)? On stipends - the base stipend for UMBC is grossly below the average for institutions in the area, other UMD system schools, and incredibly inequitable given the cost of living for this region. At the minimum - a graduate student should not qualify for WIC if single and pregnant"

STATISTICS PHD STUDENT

"Pay is the biggest issue but you will not(can not) do anything about it"

"Is there a way to have all (if not, some) of the mandatory fees be waived for GAs without subtracting it from our stipend? A big part of our stipend always goes to pay the fees every semester"

Concerns about Transit and Parking

- 48% of CNMS students have given feedback about UMBC transit. 60% rated UMBC transit average, satisfactory or poor.
- Main concerns:
 - Buses are not frequent enough in some routes
 - Not in time
 - No real-time tracking
 - UMBC Transit doesn't cover some housing areas.
- Public transit is not affordable, even with the discount.
- Lack of security cameras in UMBC parking lots.

PHYSICS PHD STUDENT

"No more live tracking of busses, multiple times busses skipped stops or didn't come out late on the downtown route."

PHYSICS PHD STUDENT

There have been several car break-ins and hit and runs (my car was hit in a parking lot this semester) but there are no security cameras in the majority of the parking lots. This seems like a huge oversight, particularly as these incidents become more frequent.



Concerns about Transit and Parking: Suggestions

- Can we increase the frequency of transits on other demanding routes other than “Paradise” ?
- Request free MTA passes.
- With the recent multiple vehicle theft and hit-and-run incidents what steps has the administration taken to ensure students safety

- Mandatory Semester Fees.
- Better Stipend and benefits.
- RA Addendum and workload.
- Mandatory training for Faculty to ensure positive and supportive academic environment.
- Establish clear policies on GA exploitations to ensure safety of GAs.
- Transit and parking lot issues.



- UMBC Graduate School. <https://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/stipends/>
- Cost of living calculator, Payscale. <https://www.payscale.com/cost-of-living-calculator/Maryland-Baltimore>
- Cost of living calculator, Bestplaces. https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/county/maryland/baltimore
- MIT's Living Wage Calculator. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/pages/about>
- Graduate Student Association Surveys 2022-23: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qByQCJ6qnzl1bkQdpCDNQ1vYOxXENXrG?usp=share_link
- M&C Survey-Spring 2024 https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdgqIGngSXiVqrw7YUWI87C5PSlii-Htu9P3_M9KVq1D1TTPQ/viewform?usp=sharing
- Physics & Chemistry Department Survey responses. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-FAMQ3n4Ncy-AFHWDk2W3ZQDT9LOKfts?usp=share_link