



Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities University of Missouri

Ratified by the Thirty-Third General Assembly of the Graduate Professional Council on March 1, 2016

Preamble

We the graduate and professional student population of the University of Missouri, with the recognition that we are integral members of the university community, request transparency for all expectations made of graduate and professional students, with an acknowledgment that many of us serve in a dual role as both student and employee of the University of Missouri.

Furthermore, we the graduate and professional student population of the University of Missouri require administrative recognition of our holistic selves. We are individuals who possess intersecting roles that necessitate a comprehensive understanding of this reality. We are students, employees, parents, caretakers, community leaders, and partners, who share needs, commitments, challenges, and grievances that must be respected by the University.

Our academic success, individual wellness, financial stability and health, as well as professional advancement is dependent upon certain fundamental conditions within our environment as graduate and professional students.

To ensure these essential principles of transparency and holistic recognition may be practiced, we hereby establish the following Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for all persons categorized as graduate and professional students regardless of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status at the University of Missouri:

Academics

Graduate and professional students at the University of Missouri are students, and as such, we have a right to:

1. Academic Support and Guidance

- a. **Be informed about options when an advisor takes leave, retires or departs from the institution.** As an advisor's departure can negatively impact a student's academic progress, departments should have a clear policy regarding his/her options when an advisor goes on leave. Also, if a professor departs from the institution while the student's work is in progress, departments should provide the student with immediate alternate options.
- b. **Change advisors or programs without retaliation.** Graduate and professional students have the right to be protected from retaliation in all forms (e.g., negative letters of recommendation, intentionally spreading negative information by other means) after or while changing advisors.

- c. **Accurate information about potential advisors.** Information about potential advisors can be important in a student's career as a student and a professional; therefore, pertinent information such as academic expectations, placement record, and time to degree completion for individual advisors should be available and accessible to graduate and professional students.
- d. If a degree program is to be discontinued, provisions should be made for students already in the program to complete their course of study.

2. Clear Evaluation Criteria

- a. Graduate and professional students are evaluated by their departments. These evaluations impact the opportunities available to students and their progress toward completion of their individual programs; as such, there should be a clear evaluation criterion (that reflects the standards used in practice) provided to graduate and professional students with regard to:
 - i. **Language proficiency tests:** As a student may have to pass a language proficiency test to complete duties or meet expectations of his/her department or have opportunities made accessible to the student that would be accessible if not for the language requirement, the evaluation criteria for passing such an exam should be clear, available to the student, and presented in a way that takes into account the possible language difficulties the student might possess.
 - ii. **Course distribution requirements:** As departments require that graduate and professional students fulfill course distribution requirements, they shall make readily available all such requirements. Further, if the distribution requirements change while a student is still in her/his program, she/he shall have the option to only satisfy requirements in place when the student began her/his program. However, should the student's decision to pursue the new requirements increase the amount of time that he or she needs financial support from his or her department, departments are not required to meet this additional need.
 - iii. **Evaluation of assignments and responsibilities in courses:** As a course may require students to complete some assignment(s), the course syllabus or subsequent materials (e.g. rubric) should clearly state the evaluation criteria for each assignment. Further, a syllabus is required in every course within the first two weeks of the course's first meeting. Any changes to the course syllabus should be made in writing with a minimum of one week of notice for upcoming assignments. Additionally, evaluation criteria should be made explicit for research courses.
 - iv. **Non-coursework evaluations:** As degree programs often require students to be evaluated in ways beyond coursework, students have a right to know what the criteria are for these evaluations. Such policies should be posted publically, and in an easily accessible format. For example, students have a right to be informed by formal, fully articulated departmental standards and procedures as to the criteria for successfully defending MA work, a thesis, or dissertation, passing comprehensive exams, etc.

- b. Occasionally students fail to meet the evaluation criteria set by their respective departments. If a student fails to meet the requirements of a course, defense, comprehensive exam, language proficiency test, or other evaluation that the student is required to pass to progress through the program, then that student has a right to be informed by formal, fully articulated departmental standards and procedures as to the consequences of not meeting those criteria and the options available to the student for remedying the issue.
 - c. When students have an opportunity to evaluate their professors, he/she has the right to do so without fear of retribution and with the assurance of confidentiality.
3. **Graduate and professional students have the right to accurate information about the availability and the likelihood of financial and resource support within their respective programs.** Departments should provide a thorough description of the requirements, qualifications, and applicable deadlines necessary for academic employment, training or financial support at the university.
4. Assignments of office space or lab space, or any other necessary materials for teaching or research should consider the need for adequate graduate and professional student space and resources.
5. **Graduate and professional students have the right to information about specific and concrete degree requirements.** These requirements shall be communicated clearly upon entrance to the program. No graduate and professional student shall be held to program requirements instituted after their initial acceptance, unless the student chooses otherwise (see 2.a.ii). Prospective and current students have the right to know specific details of a program such as
 - a. **Normative time to degree**
 - b. **Average time to degree**
 - c. **Student attrition rate and reasons for attrition**
 - d. **Placement record**
 - e. **Accurate financial requirement to complete the program**
6. **Graduate and professional students have the right to serve as student representatives in decision making processes at departmental faculty meetings and on faculty committees, such as curriculum, planning, etc.** This provides for an increased communication of student ideas and concerns and also helps graduate and professional students gain experience as future academicians and professional leaders. Graduate and professional students have the right to raise concerns with the program administration and to be given reasonable policy explanations without fear of an unprofessional response. Student representatives may be excluded from discussions of personnel and for FERPA-related issues.

Professionalization

1. Graduate and professional students, as individuals being trained to enter a professional community, shall have a **right to receive reasonable education regarding professional development opportunities**, as well as reasonable support pursuing such opportunities, the pursuit of which shall not incur any penalty on the part of the student.

2. **Graduate and professional students have the right to refuse to perform tasks if they are not explicitly linked to their academic or professional development.** The student's lesser status, authority and experience should not be exploited to the personal advantage of a faculty member. Students should not be expected to work on faculty member's private endeavors without compensation (and have the right to refuse such work without retaliation) that may be linked to the faculty member's non-academic work (e.g. if the faculty member owns a consulting business).
3. **Academic and professional conferences** provide crucial opportunities for graduate and professional students to share their research with other scholars in their field and to develop relationships that are integral to their career development, which ultimately reflects well on the degree-granting institution. As such, graduate and professional students have a right to information about financial assistance options for conference travel, and a right to be free from penalty (although missed coursework needs to be arranged for with the instructor) for reasonable conference attendance.
4. **Interdisciplinary research** projects receive wider acclaim, receive larger grants, and are crucial to bridging the gap between academic fields and between academia and industry. As such, graduate and professional students have the right to support—in the form of both encouragement and education on opportunities—for pursuing interdisciplinary study, research, or work.
5. **The academic job market** is highly saturated, hyper-professionalist, and is highly specific to each field. Because graduate and professional students are training to enter such fields so that they may make a living, and may reflect well on their degree-granting institution, graduate and professional students shall have the right to field-specific assistance, at the expense of the University, in preparing for the job market.
6. **Student leadership and campus involvement** helps produce an individual who is better-prepared to enter any career, and particularly a career in academia. Such leadership and involvement is also correlated with stronger academic performance. Furthermore, such leadership and involvement improves the campus community in a myriad of ways. Finally, such leadership and involvement is valuable for making a student feel invested in his/her education and the degree-granting university. As such, graduate and professional students shall have the right to not be hindered from pursuing such opportunities and the further right to reasonable support in pursuit of such opportunities.
7. **Service and outreach** both internal and external to one's department are a large part of most academic teaching jobs, and are duties for which graduate and professional students are often poorly-prepared. Graduate and professional students shall have a right to reasonable opportunities for service involvement, preferably within their home department or specific to their field of study.
8. **Careers outside of academia** are a legitimate aim for graduate students, and such careers raise the profile of the degree-granting institution across diverse industries. However, support for students pursuing non-academic careers is frequently lacking at both the departmental, college, and university levels. Graduate students shall have the right to support in pursuing careers that fall outside of academia and/or outside of their area of research. This support should come in the form of education, information, mentorship, and direct and clear department support.

Employee Rights

As graduate students at the University of Missouri are also often employees, they have a right to:

1. Clear expectations regarding duties as employees including the number of weekly hours expected for the completion of these duties as employees. Given that the duties of graduate student employees predictably change as the graduate employee progresses through the program, departments shall provide graduate employees with what is expected throughout the program. Information about employees' Title IX, FERPA and other federal/state law obligations must also be provided.
2. Graduate students with teaching assistantships should be given significant notice of assignments in all academic departments. Many graduate students must meet course requirements while also functioning as teaching assistants and graduate instructors. A slow response from academic departments with regard to teaching assignments may result in a graduate student's inability to properly register for required courses. Uncertainty about research and teaching assignments may also cause undue stress on graduate students, which could adversely affect their abilities to conduct thoughtful research and develop engaging undergraduate courses. All teaching assistants and graduate instructors should be given their undergraduate course assignments with ample time to consider course texts and materials.
3. Transparency in distribution of positions available.
4. Information about legal protections entailed by employment status, such as leave, workers compensation, and others.

Financial Rights

Graduate student employees are often financially dependent on the University for their livelihood. Uncertainties in the length, timing, or conditions of financial support have a strong negative impact on graduate employees' well-being and productivity. As such, students have a right to:

1. Accurate payment schedule communicated prior to the start of each academic term, detailing the amount to be paid and the dates.
2. A detailed description of the requirements of financial support.
3. A clear statement detailing the length of guaranteed financial support.
4. Clear policies regarding permissibility of employment outside students' program of study, both on and off campus.

Additional uncertainties in the amount of extraneous fees levied by various entities at the university create additional hardship. Therefore, students have the right to:

1. Description of all fees for coursework, insurance, student associations, and University facilities provided prior to the start of each academic term.

Because not all graduate student employees fall into the same tax status, tax information should be available and easily accessible. Some graduate student employees are not technically employed by the university but are considered to be independent contractors. This has serious tax implications that are often not fully disclosed at the beginning of a program of study. Programs and departments should not be allowed to hide, omit, or otherwise obscure tax status from current or incoming students.

Expectations about well-being

As the wellbeing of graduate students is critical to their academic success, they have the right to:

1. **Healthcare:** Graduate student employees, as befitting their constrained financial situations and contribution to the well-being of the university, shall be provided with adequate financial healthcare coverage at the expense of, or at the very least greatly subsidized by, the university.
2. **Mental health services:** On or off-campus mental health services may have limited appointment availability or operate during hours that may conflict with other duties or obligations made of graduate and professional students (attending courses, being in lab, teaching, etc.). Students have a right to (within reason) prioritize the pursuit and access of these services above such requirements without penalty from an advisor or department. Should long term care be needed, departments shall make a reasonable effort to accommodate the graduate student's mental health needs.
3. In addition, given that students may not want others to know that they are pursuing or receiving health care (mental or otherwise), and a lack of a guarantee to confidentiality could discourage the pursuit or receiving of care, graduate and professional students have a right that advisors or other members of their department's faculty or staff not share that the student is pursuing or receiving care nor may they share the nature of that care, excluding situations where a student may be harmful to themselves or others.
4. **Campus Safety:** Graduate and professional students often have work and school obligations that require their presence on campus beyond routine business hours. As a result, many unaccompanied graduate and professional students find themselves returning to their vehicles or nearby homes at late hours of the night. It is an expressed concern that our students need to feel safe as they walk our campus at all times. As such, the University of Missouri should prioritize campus safety, acknowledge this reality for its graduate and professional students, and provide services or mechanisms that imbue these students with a sense of security throughout their academic careers.

5. **Family Leave:** Family is an important institution for many of our graduate and professional students. As they embark on their academic and professional journeys toward higher education, our students may also find themselves on the brink of an entirely different venture.

1. The prospect of being a new parent is an innately exciting development that also invites a fair amount of stress and anxiety, particularly among individuals who also have academic and professional obligations. We should strive to reduce these worries by providing opportunities for them to realize their new role as parents without fear of penalty by the University of Missouri, their academic or professional programs, or advisors. Accordingly, students have a right to maternity and paternity leave. This is but one, yet an essential solution to the potential pitfalls of new parenting as a graduate and professional student.

2. Likewise, caring for one's own aging or elderly parents may present unexpected burdens and apprehensions. The loss of a parent, be it sudden or slow, makes its indelible mark in each of our lives. Indeed, students may (and often do) find themselves caring for their young children and their aging parents concurrently. We should aim to support these students in their role as caregivers without fear of penalty by the University of Missouri, their academic or professional programs, or advisors. Accordingly, students have a right to eldercare leave.

3. As aspiring scholars, healthcare providers, and professionals, graduate and professional students should not need to make the unimaginable choice between abandoning their education and caring for their loved ones when brothers, sisters, sons, or daughters are diagnosed with mental and physical impairments. In the interest of attracting the best and brightest, the University should illustrate its commitment and compassion for its graduate and professional students when family leave or flexible scheduling becomes necessary to care for relatives in need.

6. **Grief:** Unfortunately, we all experience the loss of loved ones. The ensuing pain and trauma can only be measured on an individual basis. Consequently, many students need time to process their grief before returning to the inherent stress of their academic and professional obligations. Students have the right to take time off without fear of penalty from the university, their academic programs, or advisors. They have a right to honor their loved one, the immense loss, and their own mental, emotional, as well as spiritual well-being. This right is in recognition of their holistic selves.

7. **Wage Issues:** Graduate and professional students understand that as student employees, there should be no expectation of personal wealth. We acknowledge that as scholars and professionals in training, our compensation is a reflection of this status. Nonetheless all graduate and professional student employees, regardless of FTE designation, on appointments for 9 months or longer in a given year should be entitled to wages exceeding the standard poverty line, as determined by the federal government. For students on .50 FTE appointments for 9 months or longer in a given year, wages for that year must not be less than the amount determined by the MIT Living Wage Calculator. Without receiving a wage or a stipend of at least this much, graduate and professional students (especially those with families) would be unduly burdened with

debt to maintain a minimum standard of living. Graduate and professional students should not be paid so little that they are required to find external funding or employment, or take out extra loans to maintain a minimum standard of living.

8. **Sexual Assault:** Graduate and professional students have the right to be protected legally, physically, financially, and publicly by the university where sexual assault is concerned. The University shall also provide comprehensive information and training on sexual assault and sexual assault prevention to all graduate and professional students.

9. **Child Care:** For many graduate and professional students, the decision to continue or resume educational goals requires a careful balance of academic and family life. It is in the interest of the university to make clear their dedication to graduate and professional student families by providing on-campus childcare facilities. This is not only an issue of availability, but of affordability. The cost of on-campus childcare should therefore reflect the budget of the average graduate and professional student.

Responsibilities

Graduate and professional students and/or employees are responsible for the following:

1. **Graduate and professional students have a responsibility to conduct themselves, in all educational activities, in a manner befitting a junior colleague.** Graduate and professional students have the responsibility to respect and uphold all the relevant university policies regarding professional conduct.
2. Graduate and professional students have a responsibility to provide accurate and honest reporting of research results and to maintain ethical norms in research methodology and scholarship.
3. **Graduate student employees have a responsibility to fulfill their respective teaching and/or research obligations to the best of their knowledge, training and ability.** Graduate student employees are responsible for carrying out their job responsibilities in a thorough and timely manner. The student employees should inform the university of any changes or circumstances that would prevent them from carrying out these obligations.
4. **Graduate and professional students are ultimately the most important individuals in safeguarding their well-being, monitoring and advancing their academic progress.** They are responsible for devoting appropriate amount of time and energy toward achieving their advanced degree within normative time, except when special circumstances apply.
5. Graduate and professional students have a responsibility to understand their role in the development of the professional relationship between faculty mentor and the student.
6. Graduate students have the responsibility to take ownership of their own academic program and progress.

Disclaimer

Graduate and professional students also reserve rights that are not specifically recorded in this document, but otherwise specified by the university, the academic community, or the nation.