

August 22, 2015

Dear fellow graduate students, MU community, and administration,

On August 21st, Chancellor Loftin, Provost Stokes, and Vice Chancellor Foley responded to concerns voiced by the the Forum on Graduate Rights (FGR). The FGR is a grassroots collection of graduate student employees that formed in the wake of recent news that MU would be cutting health insurance subsidies for its graduate student employees. Both the Graduate Professional Council (GPC) and Graduate Student Association (GSA) would like to address this matter, as many of the issues raised by FGR are issues that GPC and GSA have advocated for in the past.

The Aug. 21 statement made clear that the initial decision made by administration to rescind the health insurance subsidy for graduate student employees had been made without due diligence. The aforementioned administrators have since announced that graduate student employee health insurance subsidy will be reinstated for the next year (Aug. 2015 - Aug. 2016). Graduate students were pleased to learn of the one-year reinstatement of graduate student employees' health insurance subsidies, but there has been no word on what will happen after Aug. 2016.

Regarding the remaining items on the list of concerns voiced by the FGR in their August 19th press release, Chancellor Loftin's solution appears to be reliant on shared governance. Specifically, Chancellor Loftin's recent statement made passing reference to **(1)** the Graduate Student Experience task force and **(2)** the recently-formed Budget Allocation Advisory Council (BAAC) as the primary vehicles through which these issues would be addressed.

It is not clear that shared governance mechanisms are adequately-equipped to address the specific issues at hand, for the following reasons: **(i)** These issues have accrued over years, are numerous and multi-faceted, and concern both pressing and basic needs of graduate students and of graduate student employees. **(ii)** Shared governance mechanisms are heavily composed of administrators who have decades of experience working within a bureaucracy, which allows them to prioritize their own items of concern over those expressed by students. **(iii)** Structures (both internal and external to shared governance groups) do not exist to allow appointed students to get the feedback from their student body that is necessary to truly represent the issues of that student body. So, while shared governance is a vital part of the student relationship with administration, it is not clear that shared governance, alone, offers an adequate solution to the issues outlined by the FGR.

Further doubt is cast on the current adequacy of shared governance mechanisms given that nearly all of the concerns voiced by the FGR in their Aug. 19th press release have been previously and repeatedly communicated to administration by GPC and GSA through official channels.

The quality and reputation of MU depends on its current and previous graduate students. More specifically, MU's standing in the AAU and competitiveness for research funding compared to peer universities is dependent upon graduate education. All efforts to support graduate student success and quality of life should be taken to ensure our success as an institution of higher education. Where this involves shared governance, such mechanisms must be critically examined.

GPC and GSA are continuing advocacy efforts focused on the local, state, and national issues that impact the lives of graduate students everyday (see appendices, below). GPC and GSA are eager to continue working with administration to address these issues.

Regards,

Hallie Thompson, GPC President
Kenneth Bryant, Jr., GSA President

Appendix A

Financial Pressures:

We would like to clarify that it is only the *minimum* stipend level that has been adjusted in the past two years. From 1999-2013, the 0.5 FTE graduate student minimum stipend increased from \$8,000 to \$10,201, a 28% increase. Inflation over that same period was 40%. Over the past two years, this stipend has increased 8% and 10%, a trend that needs to continue for the university to compete with local peer institutions like the University of Iowa, which has a \$18,080 minimum stipend. It is also worth noting that 23% of graduate student employees are 0.25 FTE and are paid roughly half the minimum stipend.

Additional pressure on stagnant student stipends has come from the fact that significant supplemental course fees have been implemented without consultation of either undergraduate or graduate students. These fees negate increases in university-wide stipends for many students that are in affected colleges or degree programs. For example, the newly-implemented Engineering Excellence fee comes to as much as \$1,260 for those enrolled as a full-time graduate student.

Housing and Childcare:

The availability of affordable housing near campus was significantly diminished with the closure and subsequent demolition of University Village Apartments in 2014. No plans have been announced to replace this housing complex. Additionally, no new graduate housing projects have been initiated by the university since the 1950s, which raises significant safety concerns in regard to existing graduate housing. The lack of adequate graduate housing is an ongoing problem faced by a large portion of both domestic and international graduate students.

Moreover, the administration did not replace the Student Parent Center after the closing of University Village, which has forced graduate student parents to go outside of the university for child care options. Such child care is less affordable and less accessible than the previous on-campus option had been. Such child care also does not follow the MU academic calendar, which places a major burden on graduate student families. Troublingly, the university [reportedly](#) agreed in May 2014 to open a new on-campus child care facility, but nothing more has come of that promise.

Appendix B

GPC Student Debt Advocacy: [GradsHaveDebt2](#)

Some Relevant GPC Resolutions:

(Note: This list excludes GPC & GSA participation in meetings, task forces, and committees.)

Financial Pressure:

[1314-06](#)

[1213-01](#)

[0809-03](#)

[0607-03](#)

Housing and Child Care:

[1314-08](#)

[1314-07](#)