



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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By

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SB 2585 SD1 – RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) writes in opposition to SB 2585 SD1, which would establish a collective bargaining unit for graduate student assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i.

UH employs three types of graduate student assistants, defined in Executive Policy 5.223:

- Graduate Assistants (GAs) providing academic and program support to units of the university. Their duties are not directly related to teaching or research and include academic advising, program planning, advising student groups, and assisting with the administration of student services offices.
- Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) work under the supervision of a faculty member and they may teach sections of a multi-section course, assist a faculty member in grading assignments or exams, advising students, and performing course-related administrative and support duties. All new GTAs are required to attend a training session offered by the Office of Faculty Development and Academic Support - Center for Teaching Excellence.
- Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) usually support the research activities of a faculty member who is the Principle Investigator on an extramurally funded grant. Their duties vary with the subject matter of the grant and may be related to the subject of the student's thesis or dissertation.

Graduate Student Welfare in General

Not all graduate students at the University are employed as graduate student assistants. At UH Mānoa in Fall, 2017, only 1237 of the 4731 graduate students were employed as graduate student assistants; nearly three-quarters of graduate students are not employed by UH. In addition, graduate students can be hired as hourly

employees on campus through the same process used for undergraduate students. The university provides extensive support for student welfare through policies and programs.

The Office of Graduate Education at UH Mānoa is responsible for providing extensive services to all graduate students, including orientation programs for new students, professional development sessions on thesis/dissertation writing, research presentations, creating a resume, University research compliance matters, personal wellness and career/life balance, as well as workshops on Title IX that are available to all students. The Office of Graduate Education web site (<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/>) provides information on Title IX and sexual harassment laws, policies and resources specifically tailored to graduate students. One of the seven Deputy Title IX Coordinators at UH Mānoa is the Associate Dean in the Office of Graduate Education. She provides ready access for graduate students to the Title IX resources on campus and is typically the first point of contact to help resolve any issues brought to the attention of OGE.

UH Mānoa provides confidential support and advocacy in specific areas of student concern. All students can access Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Student Services, the Office of Gender Equity, the Prevention, Awareness, and Understanding (PAU) Violence Program, and Student Parents at Mānoa. These units provide advocacy, support, referrals, and direct student services to graduate students. The Counseling and Student Development Center offers confidential counseling and emotional support to students, and they offer walk-in appointments for urgent or emergency/crisis services. University Health Services Mānoa is staffed by physicians, nurse clinicians, nurses and other staff to offer a wide range of medical services and programs that graduate students can access.

Many of these offices and programs have outreach and communication events to help students understand policies and laws as well as resources and how to access them. As an example, the Title IX office at UH Mānoa has delivered 19 in-person, department-specific training programs on Title IX for graduate students only. Their plans are to increase the number of training sessions, and to hold some that are open to all graduate students.

All students at UHM can utilize the Academic Grievance Procedure to pursue concerns about grades and course-related matters. In addition, graduate students also pursue grievance through the Office of Graduate Education's Academic Grievance process for concerns about graduate program requirements, qualifying or comprehensive examinations, composition of their thesis or dissertation committee, final defense of their thesis or dissertation, or infringement of intellectual property. Grievances involving professional practices within a specific graduate program are handled by the program, with final authority resting with the Dean.

The academic interests of graduate students at UH Mānoa are represented by The Graduate Student Organization, comprised of representatives from each graduate department. As part of the academic governance process at UH Mānoa, they provide input on all issues affecting graduate students. Members of GSO have seats on over 40 campus committees. GSO has two seats on the Graduate Council, which meets monthly to advise the Graduate Dean on matters related to graduate education. GSO members have a voice, then, in the Council's work reviewing existing graduate programs, new graduate courses and programs, and the modification of courses and programs. Active in an array of student, campus, and community events, GSO also manages a robust grants and awards program to help foster research excellence among graduate students.

It concerns us that there are graduate students who do not know of the resources we provide for their welfare and that educational programs have not reached them. We take the testimony you received on this bill as a call to re-double our efforts to provide effective and pervasive education, training and support services to all students on Title IX, sexual harassment, workplace and family/acquaintance violence. Students cannot reach their full potential unless they are safe and know how to remain so.

Graduate Student Employment

In addition to the concerns and experiences of graduate students in general, graduate student assistants have concerns related to their dual status as employees. Graduate student assistants receive either a 9- or 11-month appointment, generally with a work schedule of 20 hours per week or 0.50 full-time equivalence. They are supervised by a regular faculty member, or for GAs, a staff member or manager. Recruitment and hiring decisions, such as pay rates and work assignments, are made at the department level, or for GRAs, by Principle Investigators on grants. Pay rates must conform to the minimum stipend associated with each of the 20 steps in the graduate student assistant schedule, as described later in this document.

University policy and campus administrative practice define the following aspects of graduate student assistant employment:

1. *Minimum qualifications and eligibility.* Students must be enrolled in a graduate program in a discipline closely related to their duties, be in good academic standing, carry at least 6 units of graduate course credit.
2. *Work assignment.* Graduate student employees are usually hired on a 0.50 FTE basis (20 hours/week). Approval from the Office of Graduate Education is required to appoint a GTA to more than or less than this norm. During non-instructional periods, GTAs may work up to 40 hours/week. GTAs close to finishing their degree may petition the Office of Graduate Education to work up to 40 hours per week if the additional work is related to their thesis or dissertation. GRAs often are appointed at 40 hours/week.

3. *Overload pay.* Graduate student assistants who work for more hours than they are appointed to work must be compensated with overload pay at the overload rate used for lecturers.
4. *Outside work.* Graduate student assistants may hold only one assistantship at a time and may not be employed in another capacity at the University while they hold an assistantship. Work outside the University is discouraged as the priority for the University is the student's degree completion. However, in 2016, the University recognized the competing priority of students meeting their financial obligations and outside work is not prohibited.
5. *Tuition waiver.* Graduate student assistants receive a waiver of tuition for courses taken at their campus. There is a 100% tuition exemption for graduate students with a 0.50 FTE (20 hours/week) appointment and a 50% tuition exemption for graduate students with a 0.25 FTE (10 hours/week) appointment. Graduate student assistants still must pay the required student fees.
6. *Reappointment and step increases.* Appointments may be continued annually, based upon satisfactory performance and contingent on availability of funds and continuing need. After the first year, advancement to the next step in stipend (see below) shall be considered and the supervisor would request approval by the dean or equivalent. The maximum total time a student may be a graduate student assistant is three years for a master's degree student and 6 years for a doctoral or other terminal degree student.
7. *Stipend schedule.* The University establishes the minimum stipend to be paid for each of the 20 steps in the graduate student assistant schedule. There is a 4% differential between steps. This schedule is for 0.50 FTE appointments for either 9 or 11 months, and the stipend for 11-month appointments is 17% greater than that for 9-month appointments. The schedule was last adjusted in Fall 2016 and is due to be reviewed by the Office of Academic Policy and Planning before the end of the 2017-18 academic year. (see [https://www.hawaii.edu/policy/docs/temp/Attachment A Graduate Assistant Pay Schedule.pdf](https://www.hawaii.edu/policy/docs/temp/Attachment_A_Graduate_Assistant_Pay_Schedule.pdf))

In 2013, UH Mānoa Chancellor Tom Apple adjusted the schedule then in effect by raising the stipend for all graduate students appointed at steps 1 through 5 to the stipend associated with step 6. With this change, the stipend for entering graduate student assistants also rose from step 1 to step 6. Consequently, since Fall, 2013 the minimum stipend for a 0.50 FTE graduate student assistant at UH Mānoa has been \$17,502. Some of the testimony on this bill used the step 1 stipend when comparing UH Mānoa stipends with other campuses, but 0.50 FTE graduate student assistants should not have been paid at that low rate for the past 4 years.

8. *Benefits.* Graduate student assistants with 0.50 FTE appointment who serve for a minimum of three months are eligible for health plan benefits. Graduate student assistants who meet the eligibility requirements for the Family and Medical Leave

Act or Hawaii State Family Leave may request leave following University procedures. They do not qualify for retirement benefits.

9. *Schedule accommodation and duties coverage.* Graduate assistants do not earn vacation or sick leave. In situations where a graduate assistant is unable to attend work due to illness or emergency, they are to contact their supervisor, who is designated when they are appointed (e.g., department chair, principal investigator, etc.), who will identify a way to provide accommodations in the graduate student assistant's work schedule. In the case where there are critical teaching or research deadlines, the graduate assistant shall work with the designated supervisor to identify resources to provide the critical teaching or research coverage. This procedure is analogous to how faculty are required to notify their supervisor of absences because of illness.
10. *Employment-related grievances.* The University has had a grievance procedure in place since 1983 for employment-related grievances for persons (including applicants for positions) not covered by collective bargaining agreement grievance procedures or other applicable University procedures.

To summarize this procedure (see A9.110 for further details), a graduate student assistant or their representative files a written statement of the grievance with a Vice President (for system-related grievances) or a Chancellor (for campus-related grievances) within 20 days of the action complained of. The Vice President's or Chancellor's written decision is made within 20 days of receipt of the grievance. The graduate student assistant may appeal that decision to the President in writing within 15 days. The President or designee renders a final and binding decision within 30 days.

The University believes that we have policies and practices in place that treat graduate student assistants fairly. We undertook a major revision of our policies for graduate student assistants in 2016 and those revisions are reflected in many of the points listed above. It is clear from the testimony on this bill that we have more work to do in communicating our policies and practices on employing graduate student assistants. Toward that end, the Office of Graduate Education at UH Mānoa convened two task forces in Fall, 2017 to develop: 1) materials and training modules on the best practices for faculty mentoring of graduate students and 2) developing policies and procedures on how to improve the mentoring process campus-wide, including the response to cases where inadequate mentoring is taking place. The Office of Graduate Education works with the faculty on the Graduate Council and the larger Graduate Assembly (composed of the faculty Chairs of all graduate programs on campus) to improve existing practices and to identify new policies and practices that will enhance the welfare of all graduate students, not just those employed by the university.

The Regents budget request submitted to the Governor last year and this year included funds to increase graduate student stipends. UH continues to request funds for this purpose.

We commit here to a focused effort over the next three months that will bring together the administrative, faculty, and student entities having responsibility for the education and welfare of our graduate students, with the aim of ensuring effective communication of current university policies and practices, as well as facilitating input and feedback on new and proposed policies and practices.

We thank you for this opportunity to testify on this measure.