

Graduate Associate Compensation and Benefits Committee Annual Report 2006

On behalf of the Graduate Associate Compensation and Benefits Committee (hereafter GCBC) of the University Senate, I write to communicate to you and your staff the goals and priorities for improvement in graduate student life that the committee has identified and the actions that it believes the university should undertake over the coming fiscal year to achieve them.

Established last year from a former ad hoc committee, the GCBC began to hold formal meetings in January 2006. Our committee is directed to “study the adequacy and other attributes of the university’s policies and provisions” respecting graduate student compensation, and thenceforth to “make recommendations” to appropriate university bodies based on our conclusions. Over the past two months the committee has worked diligently to fulfill that mission ahead of next year’s fiscal preparations. Our recommendations represent the collective will of a diverse body, which includes graduate student associates, faculty, staff, and administrators. Attached to this document you will find a roster listing the committee’s members.

You will find the remainder of this memorandum divided in two sections. The first will briefly explain how the committee interprets past efforts to improve graduate student compensation and benefits and the quantitative data that place those efforts in comparative perspective with peer institutions. It will provide the context in which the committee situates its recommendations. The second section lists the recommendations themselves

I. The Rationale: To Continue a Successful Mission in Progress

Upon reviewing the Graduate Quality of University Experience (G-QUE) report and information from the Office of Human Resources, the committee concluded that we stood in the enviable position of working with an administration that has made a significant and strategic commitment to the wellbeing of its graduate students, and that further improvements on their behalf could only be viewed in terms of continuity with university policies elaborated over the past decade. The administration has long recognized that the matriculation and retention of a selective pool of graduate students constitutes a critical component in ensuring the future stature and success of the entire university community. For that reason, in 2001 it included graduate student associates in its Competitive Compensation Initiative for the first time. Since then, initiatives to improve the graduate student experience have unquestionably helped to improve the overall competitiveness of the university in relation to its recognized peer institutions in a number of indices related to research awards, overall productivity, and graduate student selectivity.

The committee especially applauded how the administration made the augmentation of healthcare subsidies for graduate associates a priority, boosting individual subsidies from 46% to 75%, and dependent coverage from 25% to 50% in the past two years alone. Despite such improvements, Ohio State is ranked ninth among twelve recognized peer institutions in terms of overall medical benefits to graduate associates, a status not in

keeping with the university's master plan to become a more competitive school. Committee members agreed that raising healthcare subsidies would improve the lives of all graduate associates at the university, regardless of stipend, academic program, job title, national origin, gender, marital or family status, or any other conceivable factor or circumstance. They also reasoned that improving access to affordable healthcare for all graduate student associates and their dependents would be in keeping with the values promoted by the university and the state of Ohio.

The committee thus unanimously agreed that augmenting graduate student healthcare subsidies stood as the chief immediate priority for the university in the coming fiscal year. It also identified inequities in base stipends and the subsidization of fees, including that charged for the RPAC, Student Activities, COTA, etc., as issues affecting graduate student compensation worthy of further investigation. With insufficient data at hand, members disagreed on how best to address such issues, but did agree that Payroll Services should make automatic payroll deductions of required fees beginning no later than autumn 2006. The committee has further resolved to study, assess, and report on where improvements can be made in these and other areas over the coming months. The committee will eventually propose and implement a multi-year plan to achieve improvements in these and other areas related to graduate student benefits and compensation.

II. The Recommendations

Based on the rationale provided above, the committee strongly recommends that the university:

- (1) Raise health insurance subsidies for graduate associates from 75% to 85% coverage beginning in autumn 2006.
- (2) Raise health insurance subsidies of graduate associates' dependents from 50% to 85% coverage beginning in autumn 2006.
- (3) Ensure that the quality of healthcare plans in no way diminishes on account of these changes.
- (4) Require Payroll Services to take whatever steps necessary to begin automatic payroll deductions of required fees from graduate associate stipends beginning in autumn 2006.
- (5) Work with our committee to formulate a multi-year plan that holistically addresses graduate student compensation and benefits over the coming months.

In conclusion, we believe that our recommendations accurately address graduate student concerns, and that the university stands to gain by addressing them. The university has made significant strides over the past several years to improve the quality of graduate student life overall, and to improve access to affordable healthcare in particular. We ask

that the university continue to take concrete action to address that commitment, since the strategies pursued over the past several years have proven beyond doubt that it is in the vested interest of the entire university community to do so.

I thank you for your attention to this memorandum. Should you have any questions about its content, please feel free to contact me.