UNIVERSITY SENATE ANNUAL REPORT FORM

Executive Summary

Period: 2025-2026

Current Committee Chair: Bryan Pérez Soto
Incoming Committee Chair: TBA
Committee Members: Megan Hill, graduate student; Kirsten Myers, graduate student; Sara Sequeira, graduate student; Kaveri Sarkar, graduate student; Zachary Miller**,** graduate student; Keith Gooch, Faculty Council; Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Grad Council Faculty; Andrew Blatter, Dean of Graduate School/Designee; Natalia Higuita-Castro, VP Office of Research/Designee; Dawn Shrimplin, VP Office of Human Resources/Designee; Sabrina Dye, VP Office of Human Resources/Designee
Number of Meetings: 8 meetings of the full committee, additional 8 meetings with smaller teams working on specific items/research/issues.
Do you have Bylaws?
If yes, please attach: See Attached

Briefly describe the key accomplishments of your committee this year: See below

Please reflect on the goals set for this committee identified in the prior Annual Review and describe how they were addressed: N/A

Please indicate key goals that you would like to accomplish in 2026-2027: See below.

Did you consult with any other Senate Committees? Are there other committees with which you feel this committee should connect in 2025-2026? N/A

Meetings (# or Dates)	*Number in attendance*	*Guests (#)*	*Names*
09/08/25	9	-	-
10/13/25	8	-	-
11/10/25	9	-	-
01/26/26	5	-	-
02/09/26	9	-	-
03/09/26	7	2	Mary Stromberger, Sabrina Durso
04/13/26	8	-	-
05/04/26	9	2	Mary Stromberger, Sabrina Durso

Graduate Compensation and Benefits Committee (GCBC)
2025-2026 Annual Report
The Ohio State University Senate
Approved: 05/04/2026

Duties and Responsibilities (*Bylaws*)

The Graduate Associate Compensation and Benefits Committee (GCBC) is a standing committee of the University Senate and operates pursuant to section 3335-5-48.18 of the Faculty Rules and is governed by the provisions of rule 3335-5-46 of the Administrative Code.

1. Study the adequacy and other attributes of the university's policies and provisions Including stipends, outside professional services, and supplemental compensation.

2. Conduct research and provide advice on economic support of graduate associates, professional development, quality and design of benefit programs, and appointment terms.
3. Make recommendations to the university senate, the graduate council, the graduate school, and the office of academic affairs as appropriate.

State of the committee

The committee had regular meetings during the 2024-2025 academic year where they worked on providing recommendations to The Ohio State University regarding graduate compensation and benefits. The specific areas the committee focused on were graduate stipend increases to match a livable wage, providing year-round funding model to all graduate associates (PhD level), and evaluating subsidized housing options provided by the university. The committee gathered data and provided figures comparing our stipends to Big Ten universities and how their rates reflect the cost of living in the housing city/state.

This 2025-2026 academic year, the committee has also been meeting regularly and has focused on reinforcing the recommendations from the previous year by considering new data and economic fluctuations. Further, we bring data that shows how students feel about the university and their compensation via data collected from surveys done by the Graduate School and the Council of Graduate Students. Conversations have also included the process of on-boarding and how some information about benefits could be better communicated.

Key recommendations (summary)

I. Recommendations regarding graduate associate stipends:
   - Implement another 8% stipend increase in FY28.
   - Increase funding to colleges proportionally with stipend increases, to avoid further shrinking of graduate programs.
   - Develop a 3–5-year stipend forecasting plan.

II. Recommendations regarding 12-month funding models
   - Develop a full-year funding model for all PhD students.
   - Convene an ad-hoc university level committee to evaluate feasibility and implementation.

III. Recommendations regarding graduate and family housing:
   - Limit annual rent increases for graduate housing.
   - Reestablish graduate and family housing options similar to Buckeye Village.
   - Pursue structured partnerships to expand affordable housing near campus.

IV. Recommendations regarding awareness of graduate associate retirement plan options:
   - Provide uniform, structured and repeated OPERS information delivery for all graduate associates.

Recommendation topic #1: Graduate associate compensation

Graduate students can be appointed as Graduate Research Associates (GRAs), Graduate Teaching Associates (GTAs), or Graduate Administrative Associates (GAAs). Appointment type is determined by factors such as the financial capabilities of the college, unit, or program, as well as the training needs of the academic program. Because funding structures and program requirements evolve over time, graduate associates may hold different appointment types throughout their academic careers. Most appointments are set at 0.5 FTE, equivalent to 20 hours of work per week, though some positions range from 0.25 to 0.75 FTE. These appointment levels are designed to ensure that graduate associates maintain sufficient time to advance their academic progress, professional development, and timely degree completion. In FY26, the minimum stipend for a 0.5 FTE appointment is $24,138 for a 9-month appointment and $32,184 for a 12-month appointment, before taxes and deductions. The President has directed colleges and units to implement an 8% increase to these minimum stipend levels in FY27, raising them to $26,073 (9-month) and $34,764 (12-month). The committee extends its appreciation to the University Senate, President Bellamkonda, and the Graduate School for their leadership in supporting this important advancement, representing a significant achievement for graduate associates at Ohio State.

Unfortunately, the cost of living keeps skyrocketing and is currently estimated that $46,664/year are needed for standard living in Columbus (calculated using the MIT Living Wage calculator). Living expenses (rent, utilities, groceries, etc.) increase every year, resulting in students feeling housing and financial insecurity. As a committee, we went over the data collected through the Graduate Student Experience in the Research University (gradSERU) survey[1]. Overall, the respondents feel satisfaction with their academic experience at Ohio State. Figure 1 shows how students have started to feel more satisfied with the financial support when comparing response data from Spring 2023 to Spring 2025. Despite this increase, satisfaction with financial support is still notably lower than the other important metrics (i.e., satisfaction with knowledge gained and satisfaction with program) and more than 60% feel housing insecurity – a 6% increase from the previous survey.

For these reasons, the university needs to continue working on enhancing graduate associate stipends. Additionally, survey data provided by the Graduate School shows that a significant fraction of students who decide to reject admission at Ohio State cite financial reasons (Figure 2). Notably the 28% of students identify finical reasons (21% better financial aid and 7% more affordable) was greater than any other category than “other”. Notably this 28% is notably greater than the percentage of students choosing other institutions due to their better academic reputation (21%) and dwarfed other categories such as distance from home (6%) and family influence (5%).

Table 1 shows the identified universities that prospective students have decided to attend. Of these, the most common university chosen over Ohio State is the University of Michigan, which offers much higher stipends (10%). Improving graduate associate compensation would allow the university to attract more high-quality students. Some programs within different colleges and units offer higher stipends compared to the established minimum as a way to remain competitive and recruit students; some do not have the resources to do so.

As a committee, we have come up with three recommendations to strengthen graduate student compensation and improve long-term financial planning across the university. Our first recommendation is implementing another stipend increase of 8% in FY28, resulting in a monthly stipend of $3,128. Under this adjustment, yearly stipends would rise to $28,158 for 9-month appointments and $37,545 for 12-month appointments. This increase would meaningfully enhance graduate students' financial stability, reduce housing and economic insecurity, and ensure that Ohio State remains competitive in recruiting and retaining outstanding graduate talent. Our second recommendation is for the university to reallocate funding to colleges and departments proportionally with each stipend increase. While raising stipends is essential, the Colleges are not able to absorb the associated financial impact, and some programs have had to shrink the number of graduate stipends as a result of previous years' increases, jeopardizing research output and program quality. A targeted reallocation model would help programs with greater financial needs absorb these increases without compromising academic quality. Our third recommendation involves developing a 3–5-year forecasting plan outlining projected stipend increases. This would be analogous to the strategy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison[2]. A transparent, multi-year compensation trajectory would allow units, funding sources, and those seeking external grants to plan more effectively. Predictable forecasting would also mitigate the recurring challenges associated with unanticipated increases and support more sustainable long-term budgeting across the institution.

Recommendation topic #2: Year-round funding models for all doctoral graduate associates

Graduate students enrolled in PhD programs are expected to make continuous, year-round academic progress through research activities, data collection and analysis, scholarly writing, and engagement with literature relevant to their dissertation work. At present, graduate associates hold either 9- or 12-month appointments. Data from the Graduate School estimates 1,784 PhD students funded by general FD100 funds, from which 937 are in 9-month appointments and 847 are in 12-month appointments. The college with the most PhD students is the College of Arts and Sciences, with 597 students in a 9-month appointment and 460 are in 12-month appointments. To enhance Ohio State's competitiveness and research productivity, our committee recommends a formal evaluation of the feasibility of transitioning all PhD students to full-year funding models.

Although such a shift requires substantial planning and collaboration, peer-institution models provide valuable guidance. The University of Michigan guarantees 12-month funding for all PhD students on the Ann Arbor campus by allocating supplemental funds to units that need additional support[3,4]. Units that already provide year-round funding receive no additional allocations. These funds may be used only for the years promised in a student's admission offer, and any remaining funds must be restricted to support other students. Clear expectations around communication and accountability between units and central administration have been critical for implementation. Northwestern University follows a similar structure by guaranteeing 20 quarters (five years) of PhD funding, while institutions such as Penn State and the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign support their programs through summer tuition waivers, reducing financial barriers to providing year-round stipends[5-6]. Common features across these models include: (1) transparent funding timelines that enable departments to plan effectively, and (2) centralized financial support mechanisms, such as subsidies or tuition waivers, that lower the cost burden on academic units.

In alignment with these best practices, our committee recommends that Ohio State pursue the development of a full-year funding model for all PhD students. Additionally, we recommend that the Office of Academic Affairs, the Council of Deans, and senior university leadership to convene an ad-hoc committee tasked with evaluating financial feasibility, administrative implications, and pathways for implementation of this funding model. This should be in collaboration with the Council of Graduate Students. These efforts are fundamental for establishing a comprehensive year-round funding structure that would significantly strengthen the academic well-being of PhD students, support existing expectations for continuous academic progress, and position Ohio State as a more competitive institution for top-tier graduate talent

Recommendation topic #3: Graduate associate and family housing on campus

Graduate associate and family housing has emerged as a critical area of concern for the committee, given its direct impact on graduate student well-being, financial security, and recruitment competitiveness. Multiple sources of data including housing cost analyses, gradSERU results, and surveys conducted by the Council of Graduate Students consistently indicate rising levels of housing insecurity among graduate students. While the university does offer limited on-campus housing options, these units have become increasingly expensive, are insufficient in number, and are primarily designed to accommodate individual students rather than students with partners or dependents[8]. Compared with several peer institutions, like the University of California system and the University of Washington, these institutions offer dedicated graduate and family housing models that have proven effective in supporting student success and attracting high-quality applicants[9,10]. For students with families, the availability of affordable, stable housing is often a determining factor in graduate school enrollment decisions.

Survey data collected by the Housing and Family Affairs Committee (CGS) provides further insight into the scope of the issue. Of the 447 respondents (79 master's and 368 PhD students), approximately 30% of PhD respondents reported spending 50% or more of their monthly stipend on rent, while an additional 60% reported rent burdens between 25% and 49% of monthly income. Additionally, on average, graduate students living alone reported monthly rent costs of $1,186, representing roughly 40% of gross monthly income, excluding utilities, food, transportation, and insurance. Taken together, these data corroborate broader gradSERU findings indicating increasing housing insecurity and underscore the extent to which current housing costs outpace graduate stipends.

The availability and stability of on-campus housing options further exacerbate these challenges. At present, the university relies primarily on two on-campus options for graduate students: the Gateway Apartments and the Neil Building. Gateway Apartments operate under a third-party contract, meaning the university does not own the facilities and faces uncertainty regarding long-term availability should the contract change or terminate. The Neil Building is in the process of being repurposed as undergraduate housing, gradually displacing graduate residents. Both facilities are subject to annual rent increases approved by the Board of Trustees, and current rates now closely mirror or exceed surrounding off-campus market prices. As these options diminish, graduate students are increasingly pushed farther from campus, affecting affordability, commute times, and broader community engagement. The potential loss of these housing options raises concerns that the university may face a situation similar to the closure of Buckeye Village, further limiting affordable on-campus housing for graduate students and families.

In light of these findings, the committee offers the following recommendations for Senate consideration. First, the committee encourages senior university leadership to engage with the Board of Trustees to minimize annual rent increases for graduate housing to preserve affordability. Second, the committee strongly recommends exploring pathways to reestablish graduate and family housing similar to Buckeye Village, with the explicit goal of supporting students with dependents and strengthening recruitment and retention of graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and future faculty and staff. Finally, the committee recommends that the university pursue structured partnerships with local developers and real estate organizations to expand access to affordable, graduate-designated housing near campus. Collectively, these actions would address a pressing institutional challenge, improve graduate student quality of life, and enhance Ohio State's competitiveness among peer institutions.

Recommendation topic #4: Enhancing communication regarding retirement plan options

Graduate students have the option to either participate in or opt out of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS). Comprehensive details regarding this retirement plan are available through the Office of Human Resources website[11,12]. Discussions with student representatives indicate that the dissemination of OPERS-related information varies significantly across programs. As a committee, we have identified the need for more consistent, structured, and repeated communication to ensure that all graduate associates receive accurate guidance regarding their retirement options. To address this issue, we recommend the implementation of standardized OPERS informational sessions as part of onboarding and orientation for all graduate programs, updating university webpages to more clearly reflect guidance specific to graduate students, and establishing a regular communication cadence. An example is periodic reminder emails that are targeted toward first-year graduate associates.

Appendix

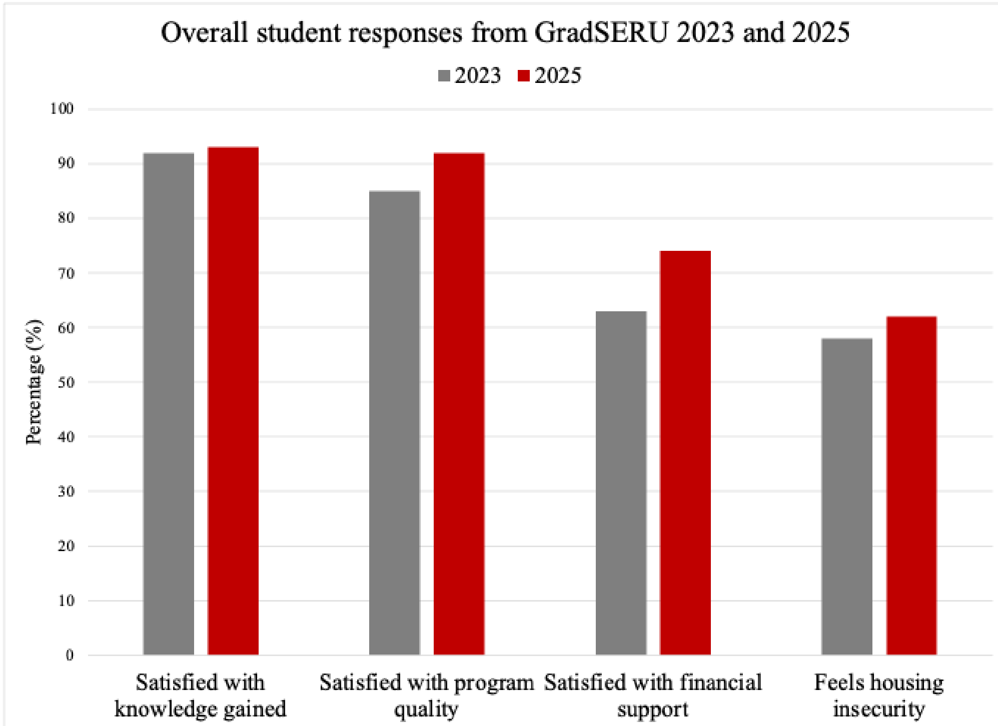

Figure 1: Data extracted from the GradSERU surveys collected by the Graduate School during Spring 2023 and 2025.

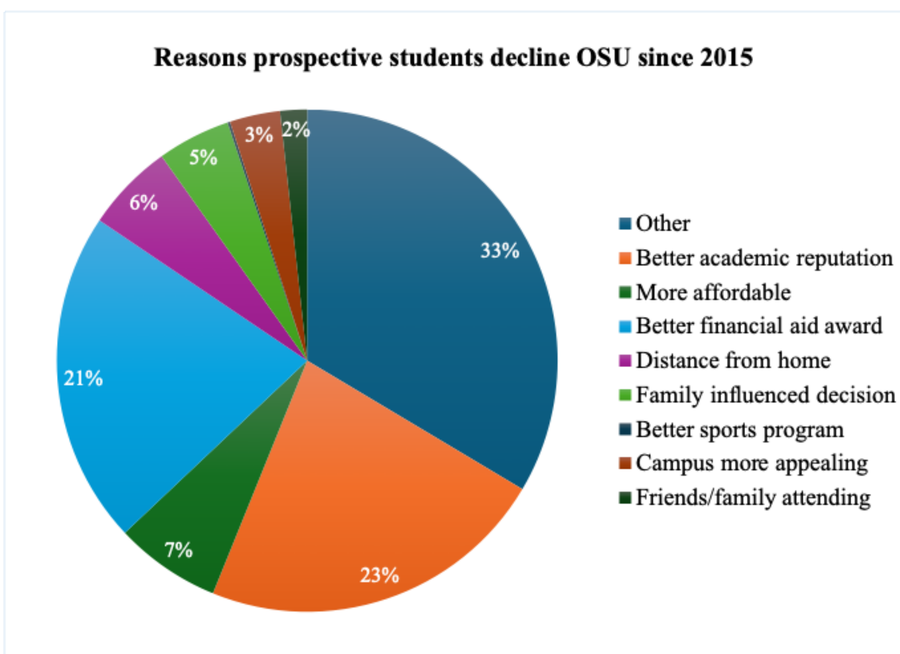

Figure 2: Data regarding prospective students decline Ohio State graduate programs. Data collected by the Graduate School.

Table 1: Identified universities to be selected instead of Ohio state. Data collected by the Graduate School.

Universities Identified	Since 2015	Since 2020	Stipends
University of Michigan	569	354	$ 38,825.36
University of Cincinnati-Main	209	153	$ 24,031.44
University of North Carolina	200	142	$ 26,462.00
Pennsylvania State University	199	115	$ 32,700.00
Cornell University	197	114	$ 47,548.00
Purdue University	180	95	$ 28,000.00
Columbia University	174	98	$ 36,060.00
Indiana University	170	106	$ 26,550.00
Duke University	167	100	$ 42,500.00
Univ of Wisconsin - Madison	165	148	$ 35,636.00
University of Washington	164	88	$ 39,297.51
Johns Hopkins University	160	105	$ 37,600.00
Vanderbilt University	159	85	$ 43,000.00
Northwestern University	157	100	$ 46,356.00
University of Pennsylvania	144	87	$ 40,608.00
University of Illinois Urbana	143	56	$ 29,925.00
University of Maryland	138	84	$ 35,760.00
University of Pittsburgh- Main	128	87	$ 27,500.00
Washington University St Louis	128	93	$ 37,853.00
Michigan State University	122	69	$ 23,952.00
University of Chicago	121	76	$ 46,350.00
University of Notre Dame	117	70	$ 39,000.00
University of Illinois	117	111	$ 29,925.00

References

1. GradSERU results from the Graduate School at The Ohio State University. Link: https://gradsch.osu.edu/faculty-and-staff/data-and-assessment/graduate-student-experience-research-university-gradseru
2. University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student stipend forecast. Link: https://grad.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/329/2024/03/GA-Minimum-Stipend-Projection-Plan-Memo-3.15.24.pdf
3. University of Michigan full-year funding policy. Link: https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/faculty-and-program-funding/12-month-funding-policy-for-rackham-phd-students/
4. University of Michigan full-year funding policy frequently asked questions. Link: https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/resources-for-directors/faq-12-month-funding-model-for-rackham-phd-students/
5. Northwestern University graduate student stipend policy. Link: https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/funding/about-graduate-funding/
6. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Department of Communication graduate student stipend policy. Link: https://communication.illinois.edu/course-catalog/ma-and-phd/graduate-funding
7. Penn State University graduate student stipend policy. Link: https://gradschool.psu.edu/funding/information-for-graduate-assistants#Funding-Support-374029

8. Graduate, professional, and non-traditional housing at The Ohio State University. Link: https://housing.osu.edu/incoming-students/graduate-professional-and-non-traditional-housing/
9. Graduate housing at the University of California, Los Angeles. Link: https://housing.ucla.edu/content/housing-single-graduate-students-and-students-families
10. Graduate housing at the University of Washington. Link: https://hfs.uw.edu/live/graduates/graduate-student-apartments/
11. The Ohio State University Human Resources website regarding retirement plans for students. Link: https://hr.osu.edu/benefits/student-employee/retirement/
12. The Ohio State University Human Resources informational document regarding graduate retirement. Link: https://hr.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/grad-assoc-benefits.pdf