



## United Faculty of Florida - Florida State University - Graduate Assistants United

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# **Graduate Assistant Union Fighting for Members as FSU Cuts Dependent Coverage and Other Benefits**

*Tallahassee, FL* - Graduate Assistants United strongly opposes Florida State University's elimination of dependent health care coverage and the trimming of other graduate assistant benefits during the upcoming academic year.

Under the leadership of **FSU President John Thrasher**, FSU has decided to stop offering dependent coverage on the student health insurance plan beginning this 2017-18 academic year. Although FSU is cutting this important benefit, the university has failed to alert graduate assistants of the change; the only notification appears on the website for the FSU student insurance plan. As a result, graduate assistants with dependents who previously received coverage must now scramble to find a replacement plan.

After slashing dependent coverage, FSU expects graduate assistants to pay more in health insurance premiums for the upcoming year. Premiums for annual coverage are increasing \$82 for domestic students and \$95 for international students for 2017-18, but currently FSU has offered graduate assistants *the same subsidy as in the 2016-17 academic year*.

“Graduate assistants rely on the health insurance benefits offered by the university through our compensation package in order to live. Making a dramatic cut without adequately notifying graduate assistants or providing ample resources and support for how to move forward this next year is simply unacceptable” said **FSU-GAU President Adela Ghadimi**.

“The average graduate assistant at FSU is already living below the federal poverty level when you take into account the money we are required to pay in academic fees each semester. Coupled with increasing health insurance costs and decreasing benefits, this presents an undue and unfair burden that is simply overwhelming for graduate assistants. The university needs to realize that increasing costs while cutting our benefits is not okay, particularly when compared to the packages offered at other universities.”

### **What GAU Is Doing**

At the next bargaining session on Friday, August 18, GAU will seek an increase in the pay and health insurance subsidy for graduate assistants. Additionally, GAU has asked to hear how FSU plans to compensate graduate assistants for the loss of dependent coverage.

Details about the bargaining session, which is open to the public, are at the end of this release.

### **FSU Lags Behind Other Public Schools**

Despite FSU's goal of becoming a top 25-ranked public university, benefits for graduate assistants at FSU compare poorly to those of graduate assistants at other public universities.



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The **Florida Board of Governors** has acknowledged the inadequate benefits at FSU. In a 2017-18 legislative budget request for FSU, the board called graduate students “key components of a competitive Research I University,” while stating that “FSU is not as economically competitive as we need to be to attract these key students.” Notably, the request added that “we have trouble getting a sufficient number of graduate assistants because we are not offering a large enough stipend.”

*FSU’s treatment of graduate assistants compares poorly even with lower-ranked schools. After analyzing data from a national survey of graduate stipends, the legislative budget request stated, “Unfortunately, most of the universities in the survey are lower-tier institutions. Even when compared to this sample of schools, FSU is nonetheless below the average when it comes to the amount of money graduate assistants receive in their stipends.”*

### Benefits Comparison of Top 3 Florida Universities

Consider the below comparison of graduate assistant benefits for the top 3 public Florida universities for 2017-18. FSU’s benefits are those currently proposed by the university.

The higher-ranked **University of Florida** — #14 in public universities by U.S. News, #50 in national universities:

- \$15,000 minimum stipend for 9-month, half-time appointment
- \$120 health insurance premium (\$10 per month) paid by graduate assistants
- Dependent coverage offered, with a 20% reduction in dependent premiums compared to 2016-17

The lower-ranked **University of South Florida** — #83 in public universities by U.S. News, #159 in national universities:

- \$14,500 minimum stipend for 9-month, half-time doctoral appointment
- \$0 health insurance premium paid by graduate assistants — USF offers a 100% health insurance premium subsidy, up to \$2,410 plus 1% above the consumer price index
- Dependent coverage offered

**Florida State University** — #38 in public universities by U.S. News, #92 in national universities:

- \$13,750 minimum stipend for 9-month, half-time appointment and a 1.75% pay increase
- \$682 health insurance premium paid by domestic graduate assistants — FSU has offered a \$1,662 subsidy (identical to 2016-17 subsidy) for an *increased* health insurance premium of \$2,344 for domestic graduate assistants
- No dependent coverage offered

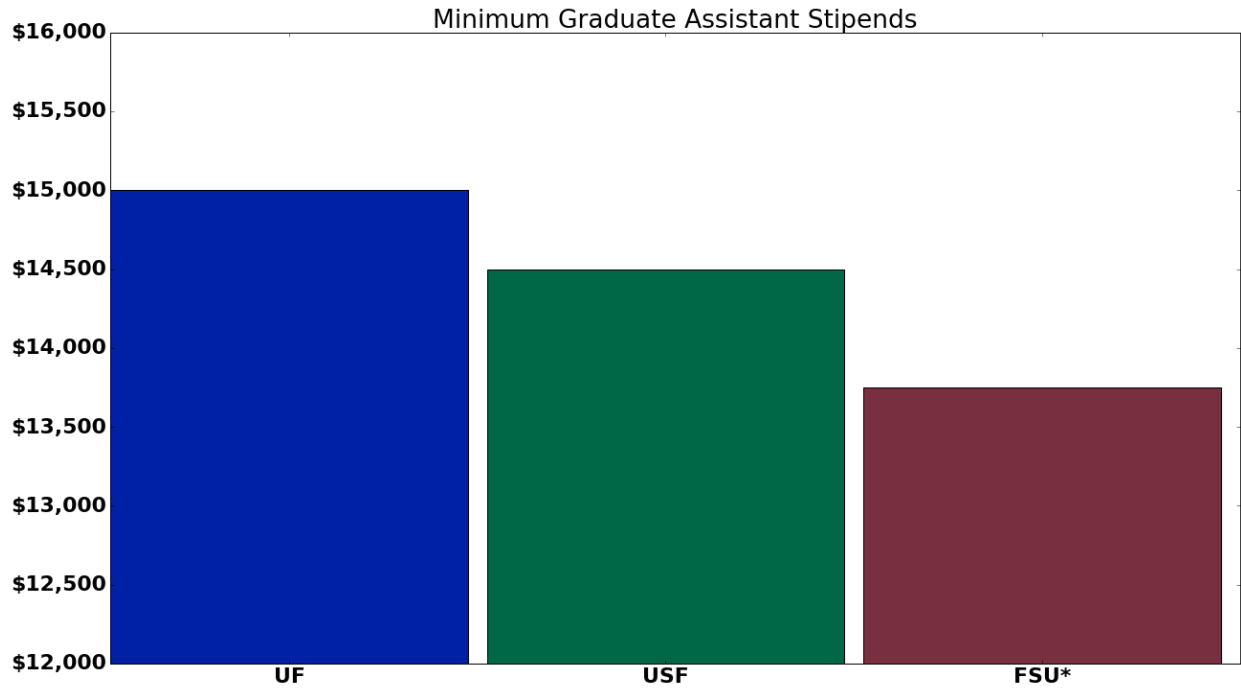
*See graphs illustrating comparison on next page.*



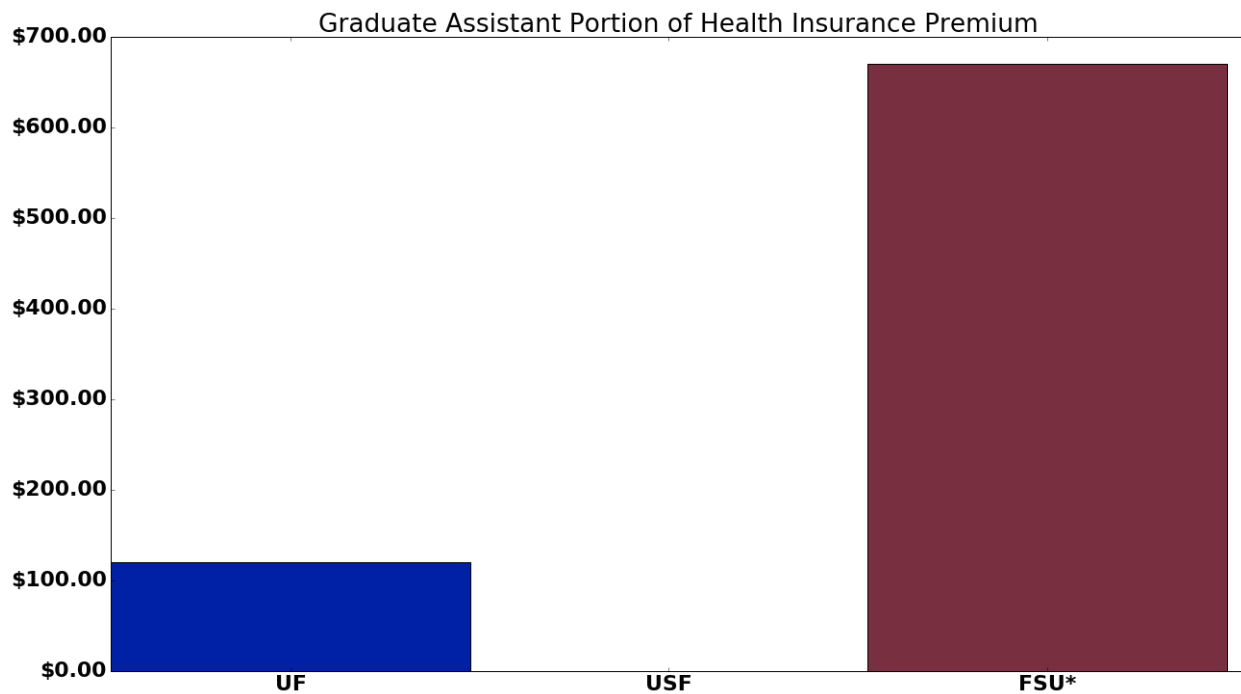
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**Graphic Benefits Comparison of Top 3 Florida Universities for 2017-18**



FSU's value reflects current Board of Trustees proposal





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### Conclusion

FSU continues to offer substandard benefits during bargaining with GAU.

“With graduate assistants teaching 30% of the academic credits offered at Florida State University and completing critical research with faculty to advance the university’s academic success, we want to see FSU appropriately compensate and prioritize the efforts of graduate assistants through a more comprehensive, competitive benefits and pay package,” stated **FSU-GAU President Adela Ghadimi**.

### Upcoming Bargaining Session

The next bargaining session is Friday, August 18, from 2-5 pm, at the FSU Training Center, located at 493 Stadium Drive (across from the stadium). The session is open to the public. Media representatives are welcome to attend.

### About GAU

GAU seeks to improve working conditions for FSU’s graduate assistants. Founded in 2008, we are the only legally recognized collective bargaining agent for graduate assistants at FSU. More info here: <http://fsugau.org/>

### Media Requests

For questions, or for additional quotes from **FSU-GAU President Adela Ghadimi**, please contact **Clancy McGilligan, Co-Chief Negotiator for FSU-GAU**, at [cmcgilligan@gmail.com](mailto:cmcgilligan@gmail.com).

### Sources

- FSU student insurance plan rates: <http://studentinsurance.fsu.edu/insurance.html>
- Florida Board of Governors 2017-18 Legislative Budget Request: [http://www.flbog.edu/board/office/budget/\\_doc/lbr/FSU-17-18-LBR-Issues.pdf](http://www.flbog.edu/board/office/budget/_doc/lbr/FSU-17-18-LBR-Issues.pdf)