



United Faculty of Florida – Florida State University – Graduate Assistants United

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NEWS RELEASE

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Graduate Assistant Union: FSU Benefits Package Lags Far Behind UF and USF

TALLAHASSEE — Graduate Assistants United strongly criticizes Florida State University's substandard benefits proposals for graduate assistants during ongoing contract negotiations and will seek improved benefits at a bargaining session Thursday. Graduate assistants teach about 30 percent of Florida State University's undergraduate courses, and FSU's poor treatment of these key employees could affect the university's rankings and leadership position.

FSU has offered pay and benefit levels significantly lower than those offered by the University of Florida (UF) and the University of South Florida (USF), which will pay around \$1,500 more for the 2018-2019 academic year and provide more affordable insurance coverage. In addition, FSU cut dependent health insurance coverage in 2016-2017 and now refuses to include this option in the graduate assistant employment contract.

"The university is at a critical juncture," said FSU-GAU President Adela Ghadimi. "The average graduate assistant at FSU is already living below the federal poverty level – that is before paying high insurance premiums and fee increases. It is our hope that FSU President John Thrasher and the Board of Trustees will take a hard look at what this means for the future of FSU."

In a recent proposal for the upcoming academic year, FSU offered graduate assistants a minimum stipend of \$14,500 for an academic-year appointment and a 1 percent competitive pay adjustment. For the same appointment, UF will pay graduate assistants a \$16,000 minimum stipend, with a \$225 raise effective Jan. 1. USF will pay doctoral graduate assistants a minimum \$16,080.

In the same proposal, FSU asked that domestic graduate assistants pay \$639 in annual health insurance premiums. In contrast, UF graduate assistants will pay \$120, while USF graduate assistants will pay nothing.



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Meanwhile, FSU has consistently refused to include a dependent coverage option in graduate assistant contracts. Dependent coverage is a basic benefit offered to employees across the nation. FSU graduate assistants have struggled to find coverage after the university cut this important benefit.

“FSU’s unexpected and unilateral removal of dependent coverage has caused significant harm to graduate assistants at FSU — some have had to leave the university, while others struggle to stay afloat,” said Ghadimi. “As employees of the university, we need FSU to eliminate this unnecessary hardship.”

Despite a 4.6 percent increase in FSU’s total budget for the coming year — a higher percentage than UF or USF — FSU’s bargaining team has claimed the university has insufficient resources.

“FSU claims it wants to increase its ranking and prioritize research, all while recruiting and retaining the best and brightest,” said Ghadimi. “However, instead of offering pay and benefits that match levels from similar universities, FSU is neglecting one of its largest bodies of employees.”

GAU will seek improved benefits at the next bargaining session, Thursday, July 26. The session is open to the public and will be 2-5 p.m. at the FSU Training Center, 493 Stadium Drive, Tallahassee. Media representatives are welcome to attend.

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UFF-FSU-GAU is the affiliate of the United Faculty of Florida and Florida Education Association representing Florida State University’s graduate assistants. Founded in 2008, FSU-GAU works to improve working conditions for graduate assistants at the university. The organization represents about 3,000 individuals working to support themselves through teaching or research while earning advanced degrees. To learn more, go to: <http://fsugau.org/>