

Graduate Student Employment Committee (GSEC)

Minutes of September 6, 2018 meeting

Present – Student: Faith, Goldberg, Henderson, Lingo, Mobley, Popovaite, White. Faculty/Admin: Tranel.

Absent – Student: DuBose, Gustafson; Faculty/Admin: Thaggert.

Ex Officio present – Faculty/Admin: Campo, Keller, Welter; Student: Golinghorst.

Guest – Faculty/Admin: Danger.

The meeting was called to order by Dean John Keller @ 1:32 PM.

1. Minutes from the May 4, 2018, meeting were approved unanimously.
2. Review of By-Laws – The GSEC bylaws (approved on May 4, 2018) are posted to the GSEC webpage. <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/graduate-student-employment-committee>. The committee agreed to add the date of bylaw adoption to the website.
3. Highlights of last year's activities – GSEC committee advanced the recommendation to the Office of the President to extend the current language, including working conditions, benefits, and insurance into the next academic year. After approval from the President, the Graduate Assistant Employment Agreement was established and posted on the Graduate College website <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/graduate-assistant-employment>.

Joni Troester, Assistant Vice President Human Resources, reviewed healthcare utilization and benefit design information. A review of nonstandard design As recommended by GSEC to the Office of the President, no changes in healthcare contracts were made for calendar year 2019.

Von Stange, Assistant Vice President Student Life, addressed the committee in relation to a student housing taskforce. He provided insights on the shifting local housing offerings, forecasted demand for housing from undergraduate students, and the nature of the University contract with Aspire.

GSEC administered a survey to graduate assistants in Spring 2018 to better understand the concerns of graduate student benefits at the University of Iowa.

Summer pay changes that resulted in unequal paychecks were discussed and a communication plan was developed and implemented by University of Iowa Human Resources.

4. Determination of monthly meeting times – In order to establish a fall meeting schedule and secure meeting room space, the committee agreed to establish routine meeting times for the Fall 2018 session. After deliberation of potential routine meeting times, members agreed that Thursday meetings beginning at 1:45 PM works better than other proposed times. Meeting invitations will be sent via Outlook calendar.

5. Review of draft GSEC Spring 2018 Survey report – Due to qualitative data, the recommendation was made that future questionnaires should include dental coverage, vision coverage and transgender care categories when determining “level of importance of coverage.”

Housing question suggests housing percent of income in Iowa City is greater than the HUD recommended percent of income. Comparing the University of Iowa with peer institutions may be useful in providing context. Explaining how decisions are made, filling an education gap through a communication campaigns to student employees, may be advantageous to students and an achievable goal for GSEC.

6. New business – Dean Keller was recently notified that a faculty member serving on the committee is on a career development leave during Fall 2018. Dean Keller will seek advice from the Faculty Senate President on whether the GSEC seat should be filled during the leave period.
7. New business – Concern was expressed that some programs continue a practice of not reappointing graduate student assistants by April 15th, as stated in the Graduate Assistant Employment Agreement. Delaying reappointment creates for the graduate student not only income uncertainty but also inadequate teaching duty preparation. “Students just want to pay their bills and do their job well.” A consequence of the state’s disinvestment in higher education and now commonplace practice of re-appropriation, programs face budgeting uncertainty until mid-summer. Additionally, come first-year undergraduate course demand is not set until summer orientations are underway. Other classifications (professional and scientific) use a furlough process to address financial flexibility and support employee transition. The question was raised whether the employment agreement should state April 15th if it is not a tenable practice.

Meeting adjourned at 2:36 AM.

GSEC Spring 2018 Survey

The GSEC Spring 2018 survey was designed with the goal of understanding graduate students' opinions and perspectives primarily regarding their health insurance benefits and secondarily regarding other benefits and concerns.

It was decided that the survey would be sent to graduate students via a series of two mass emails to all graduate and professional students. The first email was sent on 2/1/2018 and the second email was sent on 2/15/2018. The goal response rate (as a percentage of enrollment in UI Grad Care and SHIP) was 20 percent. This goal was exceeded on 2/19/2018. The final response rate was 26.78 percent of UI Grad Care and SHIP enrollees. Below are the results of the survey.

These survey results will be used to develop recommendations from GSEC to the University regarding changes effective in academic year 2019-2020, with health insurance changes effective starting in calendar year 2020.

Health Insurance Benefits

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

		Overall Sample of Respondents [^] (N = 868)		Grad & Prof Student Enrollment (N = 7353)	
		N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Race	African American or Black	24	2.8%	214	2.8%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	3	0.3%	15	0.2%
	Asian	90	10.4%	398	5.3%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	5	0.1%
	White	528	60.8%	4699	62.4%
	Other	25	2.9%	151	2.0%
	Prefer Not to Disclose	33	3.8%	402	5.3%
Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino	41	4.7%		
	Non-Hispanic or Latino	611	70.4%		
	Prefer Not to Disclose	39	4.5%		
Gender	Man	264	30.4%	3707	49.2%
	Woman	433	49.9%	3813	50.6%
	Transgender Male/Transman	2	0.2%		
	Transgender Female/Transwoman	1	0.1%		
	Gender Queer	6	0.7%		
	Please Specify	3	0.3%		
	Prefer Not to Disclose	16	1.8%		
Age*	< 25	158	18.2%	3010	39.9%
	25-29	320	36.9%	2413	32.0%
	30-34	130	15.0%	1049	13.9%
	35-39	62	7.1%	533	7.1%
	≥ 40	57	6.6%	530	7.0%
College	COM	72	8.3%	980	13.0%

	Dentistry	7	0.8%	399	5.3%
	Education	78	9.0%	574	7.6%
	Engineering	49	5.6%	300	4.0%
	Law	28	3.2%	450	6.0%
	CLAS	381	43.9%	1963	26.1%
	Nursing	19	2.2%	247	3.3%
	Pharmacy	26	3.0%	496	6.6%
	CPH	76	8.8%	332	4.4%
	Business	83	9.6%	1277	16.9%
	Joint Program	31	3.6%	517	6.9%
Program	Masters	316	36.4%		
	Doctoral	497	57.3%		
	Masters & Doctoral	26	3.0%		
Employment	TA	239	27.5%		
	RA	222	25.6%		
	Other: Internal	105	12.1%		
	Other: External	67	7.7%		
	None	124	14.3%		
	TA & RA	43	5.0%		
	Other Combination	57	6.6%		
Appointment	< 25%	131	15.1%		
	25-49%	409	47.1%		
	50%	93	10.7%		
	> 50%	180	20.7%		

*Age categories do not match; UI enrollment is reported by ages 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, and ≥ 40

^Note: 65% of respondents are covered by either UI Grad Care or SHIP

Table 2. Insurance Coverage and Plan Selection

		Overall Sample of Respondents (N = 868)		Benefit-Eligible Graduate and Professional Student Employees* (N = 2,440)	
		N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Covered by UI	Yes	564	65.0%	1824	74.5%
	No	290	33.4%	616^	25.2%
	No response	14	1.6%	---	---
Plan Selection	UI Grad Care	316	60.1%	1119	46.0%
	SHIP	187	35.6%	705	29.0%
	UI Choice	23	4.4%	---	---
Coverage	Graduate Student	427	81.6%	1592	87.28%
	Graduate Student + Spouse	58	11.1%	156	8.55%
	Graduate Student + Family	33	6.3%	58	0.99%
	Graduate Student + Child	5	1.0%	18	3.18%
Delta Dental	Yes	453	85.8%	---	---
	No	75	14.2%	---	---

*Includes job codes FT19, FR19, and FL19

^616 benefit-eligible graduate and professional student employees did not select a healthcare option offered by the university

Table 3. Level of Importance of Coverage (n = 742)

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Std Deviation
Hospital services	742	4.3	4.0	0.9
Preventive services	736	4.3	5.0	0.9
Outpatient services	731	4.1	4.0	1.0
Prescription drugs	730	4.2	5.0	1.0
Mental health and/or chemical dependency services	706	4.0	4.0	1.1
Maternity services (prenatal and postnatal services)	620	4.0	4.0	1.3
Ambulance services	697	3.7	4.0	1.2
Health care for individuals away from Iowa City	674	3.7	4.0	1.2
Allergy treatments	646	3.5	3.0	1.2
Skilled nursing facilities	586	3.2	3.0	1.3
Home health care	586	2.9	3.0	1.3
Other	79	3.8	5.0	1.8

The most common or noteworthy responses in the ‘other, please specify category’ were: 1) dental coverage (10; 19%), 2) vision coverage (10; 19%), 3) transgender care and/or LGBT clinic (3; 5.56%).

Table 4. If you could make one change to the current health insurance benefits, what would you change? (n = 722)

Variable	N	Percentage
Decreased out-of-pocket expenses (i.e., premiums, copays, coinsurance, deductibles)	321	44.5%
Enhanced vision coverage	190	26.3%
Improved dental coverage	67	9.3%
Wider network of providers to choose from	91	12.6%
Other	53	7.3%

The most common and noteworthy responses in the ‘other, please specify category’ were: 1) out-of-pocket costs for plans including coverage for spouse and family members (9; 18%), 2) prescription drug coverage and out-of-pocket costs (9; 18%), and 3) alternative medicine coverage (5; 10%).

Table 5. Other topics for GSEC (n = 1116)

Variable	N	Percentage
Housing (e.g., cost of living)	475	42.6%
Benefits other than health insurance (e.g., retirement options, wellness plans)	334	29.9%
Working conditions	224	20.1%
Other	83	7.4%

The most common and noteworthy responses in the ‘other, please specify category’ were: 1) other benefits (18; 23%), 2) funding/TA/RA/scholarships/fellowships (13; 17%), 3) tuition/fees (12; 15%), and 4) wages (10; 13%).

Selected quotes:

“Increased local opportunities for foreign students.”

“Child care help for students with families.”

“Considerations for students with dependents.”

“Focus on health care and wages (stipends, fee waivers, and tuition waivers).”

“Food insecurity: there is enough inexpensive food in the area, but not a lot of affordable healthy options (food swamp conditions).”

“Retirement plans.”

“The most important thing for me is having a safe and stable financial situation as a grad student. As an international student with no other source of income than working as a TA or RA, I do not have any idea whether I will receive a TA or RA next semester, and it is usually the matter for every semester. This unsuitability of employment, and financial matter would affect the graduate student's education plans, aims, and more importantly health.”

“Awareness of benefits.”

Other Benefits and Concerns

Table 6. Monthly average rent and utilities expenses per person in respondents’ household (n = 731)

Answer	N	Percentage
\$500 - \$699	232	31.7%
\$700-\$899	198	27.1%
\$900-\$1099	113	15.5%
< \$500	73	10.0%
\$1,100-\$1299	57	7.8%
> \$1500	31	4.2%
\$1300-\$1499	27	3.7%

Table 7. What other concerns do you have as a graduate student employee? (n = 305)

Answer	N	Percentage
Wages	60	20%
Health insurance	56	18%
Funding, TA, RA, scholarships, fellowships	49	16%

The most common and noteworthy responses in the ‘other, please specify category’ were: 1) legislation and union (43; 14%), 2) housing/cost of living (37; 12%), 3) overwork (36; 12%), 4) department and training/support (34; 11%), and 5) other benefits (31; 10%).

Table 8. What other concerns do you have as a graduate student? (n = 235)

Answer	N	Percentage
Funding, TA, RA, scholarships, fellowships	45	19%
Department and training/support	42	18%
Tuition/fees	37	16%

The most common and noteworthy responses in the ‘other, please specify category’ were: 1) health insurance (27; 11%), 2) housing/cost of living (26; 11%), 3) social support and mental health (20; 9%), 4) overwork (20; 9%).