



**GRADUATE COLLEGE**  
**Office of the Dean**

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April 20, 2020

Dear Graduate Students,:

Thank you for your April 15 letter outlining a series of concerns that graduate employees have raised as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the outset of my response, please know that the Graduate College and University of Iowa leadership is exceptionally proud of how its graduate employees have responded to the crisis. To abruptly switch your teaching efforts to the virtual realm, while also balancing your own coursework, is difficult to say the least. Personally, I admire how responsive the graduate student body has been to this unprecedented challenge.

Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic has—and will continue to—dramatically impact the university, our community, the State of Iowa, and beyond. Please know that the concerns you raised in your letter are not unique to our campus. I have been in continual communication with colleagues in the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA), the Association of American Universities (AAU), and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) regarding the challenges institutions are facing in these unprecedented times. From the beginning of the crisis, with the health and safety of our campus community at the core, the university has tirelessly responded to the rapidly changing landscape in an efficient and responsible manner. A Critical Incident Management Team was established many years ago in consultation with university officials, shared governance representatives, the Board of Regents, and the Governors Office to pivot the campus to working remotely and providing services to students, faculty, and staff to accomplish our academic mission. The university has established ongoing communications through central administration's Coronavirus website (<https://coronavirus.uiowa.edu/>) and many units, including the Graduate College (<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/coronavirus>) have likewise established sites for communicating with constituents.

While the delivery of virtual instruction is well underway, focus is being directed to "what's next" after commencement, as we move into the summer and beyond. As of now, the university fully intends to return to campus for the fall semester, to closely approximate a regular fall session as much as possible. The virus dictates the timeline and appropriate response which is constantly in flux. We are an international university so what is going on worldwide impacts us directly. There is much we simply do not know at this point including the length of crisis mitigation, enrollment impacts, future state and federal funding, and the university's overall fiscal environment. Many of your concerns will need to be reviewed with these changing circumstances in mind.

1. As you know, graduate employees on assistantships (TA, RA, or generalized to GAs) will maintain their assistantships through the spring semester (end of May). These GAs will maintain their health insurance benefits throughout the summer. GAs with fiscal year appointments will maintain their stipends and benefits through the completion of their appointment. GAs with

appointments continuing into the fall semester should see no changes to their stipends or benefits. Students who are graduating in May have the ability to continue their benefits through COBRA options. This is consistent with other staff employees who terminate their positions.

2. Communications have been distributed stating that all UI employees, including GAs will remain in their current pay status regardless of funding source as described above. As always, future GA appointments are contingent upon the availability of financial resources. Collegiate deans are aware of the vulnerability of GAs at this time and are emphasizing the need to maintain, as much as possible, financial support for GAs.

3. We understand that many graduate students are worried about their financial situation during this stressful time. As mentioned above, GAs on fiscal year appointments will maintain their support through June 30th. The Graduate College has committed funds to the Office of the Dean of Students and the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion emergency fund programs. In addition the Graduate College has committed more summer fellowships for summer 2020 than ever before. Currently the Graduate College is working to develop other potential funding mechanisms to help support graduate students in this difficult time.

4. The Graduate College is carefully monitoring current travel restrictions. We understand that research and scholarly travel has been—and will continue to be—impacted, and that this will result in alterations to plans of study. We recognize that our international graduate students are particularly vulnerable at this time and we routinely communicate with International Programs, who monitors Department of State regulations, regarding appropriate support for these Hawkeyes.

5. The university communicated its plan to refund on a pro-rated basis, the recreational and arts and cultural mandatory fees. As has been discussed via other forums, many of the fee assessments support staff who are critical to maintain valuable services that students are currently using, especially in this critical time.

6. As mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted each and every employee at the university. GAs are included in this clearly affected group. The campus is working to the best of its ability to accommodate scheduling and deadlines, while employees navigate the challenges this pandemic has created for our campus community. Undoubtedly, balancing delivery of virtual instruction and maintaining ones own scholarly work alongside personal responsibilities is daunting. We urge you to work with your supervisor to manage your work load. All of us are here to help.

7. The Graduate College and our collegiate colleagues are fully aware of the impact of the crisis on student academic and research/scholarly work. The Graduate College has alerted programs that such metrics as time to degree will clearly be flexible during this crisis. The Graduate College and the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) are in close collaboration to share information as models continue to be developed to continue research progress under the current situation (<https://research.uiowa.edu/covid-19-information-researchers>). The OVPR is also working on plans for releasing research restrictions, when it is deemed appropriate.

I speak on behalf of the Graduate College and its campus partners, when I tell you that we appreciate you sharing your concerns. Please know that we are working on these issues and will continue to listen moving forward. As we learn more about the impacts of the crisis on university operations, the Graduate College will communicate future guidelines, plans, and actions to the best of our abilities.

Finally, it is critically important that you be attentive to your own physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. It is my hope that you and your fellow students take advantage of the many valuable resources and tools in place to assist you (<https://counseling.uiowa.edu/>).

Thank you, again, for highlighting the topics that are at the forefront of graduate and professional students' minds. I would be happy to field any other questions or concerns you may have moving forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John C. Keller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John C. Keller, PhD  
Associate Provost for Graduate & Professional Education  
Dean, Graduate College