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Advocating for an inclusive and empowered graduate student community

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GPSG STATEMENT ON FINANCES, HEALTH, AND OTHER ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Over these past few months, GPSG President Dakota Coates, the Executive Committee, and the GPSG General Assembly have been working tirelessly to fight for our graduate student community on a litany of issues – and our administration continues to be fiercely focused on getting results. President Coates has continued to work closely with Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Health Sciences and Associate Dean of the University Graduate School [David Daleke](#), the Student Trustee [Molly Connor](#), Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students [Dave O’Guinn](#), Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Multicultural Affairs and Dean of the University Graduate School [James Wimbush](#), and Provost [Lauren Robel](#) to ensure that the personal, professional, and policy interests of the graduate student body is fully represented across the University. Unlike in any year’s past, the GPSG Executive Committee remained heavily involved in advocacy efforts over the winter break – and continued to make progress on vital issues. Furthermore, we continue to be an incredibly active force on student forum, campus committee, and other much more to ensure we are relaying the challenges being faced by graduate and professional students.

See below for specific advocacy and policy updates:

Financial Health and Student Workers

GPSG continues to be a leading force in addressing the financial health of our graduate students, which was a major focus of President Coates and Vice President Myers over winter break. We are happy to announce that we have made substantial progress through our work with UGS and the Provost’s Office.

Stipends

As part of an effort to increase informational awareness around the state of the Student Academic Appointee stipends, we have continued to encourage the University to track the financial status of our students. We launched a survey in the Fall about the state of graduate student finances – which will be used to inform both future advocacy efforts but is also the foundation for what we hope to be a reoccurring survey to continue to gauge the financial health of our community. Additionally, we have worked closely with the Provost’s Office and the University Graduate School to address

the current state of academic unit SAA stipends. The Provost’s office has created a summary of the academic year support for PhD SAAs in 2019-2020 (shown below).¹

	Number of PhD SAAs	Average Compensation (Stipend + Fellowships)	Average Tuition and Fee Remission	Average Health Insurance Premium	Average Total Package Funding
College of Arts & Sciences	1345	\$20,878	\$28,500	\$3,252	\$52,630
• Arts & Humanities	346	\$18,327	\$23,605	\$3,252	\$45,184
• Natural & Mathematical	678	\$22,900	\$29,182	\$3,252	\$55,334
• Social & Historical	321	\$19,527	\$25,315	\$3,252	\$48,094
Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies	40	\$22,456	\$19,250	\$3,252	\$44,958
The Media School	38	\$18,508	\$19,250	\$3,252	\$41,010
School of Education	147	\$19,571	\$20,920	\$3,252	\$43,743
Kelley School of Business	60	\$25,908	\$34,900	\$3,252	\$64,060
Luddy School of Informatics, Computing and Engineering	236	\$21,399	\$21,772	\$3,252	\$46,423
Jacobs School of Music	40	\$17,120	\$31,266	\$3,252	\$51,638
O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs	52	\$19,929	\$21,939	\$3,252	\$45,120
School of Medicine	25	\$22,500	\$31,932	\$3,252	\$57,684
School of Public Health	74	\$19,262	\$19,669	\$3,252	\$42,183
School of Optometry	11	\$21,500	\$24,881	\$3,252	\$49,633
IU Bloomington	2,082	\$21,175	\$27,348	\$3,252	\$51,775

This allowed for tracking the average stipend, tuition remission, and insurance coverage for graduate students from the prior academic year across all programs. Accordingly, this has allowed for a targeted approach aimed at increasing the average stipend across our academic programs. Notably, Jacobs has agreed to increase their stipends for FY22² by \$3,092, in order to offset a program fee and as a general stipend increase – which will raise their average from \$17,120 to over \$20,000. Similarly, the COAS Arts & Humanities program is taking steps to finalize their two-year increase for stipends which will place the program over \$19,000 in FY22. Additionally, the Luddy School has continued to work at increasing their stipends over the course of this year – amounting to an average of a 10% increase in stipends. We are incredibly happy to announce that these steps will raise the average stipend for all PhD SAA’s to over \$19,000 – and we are working to ensure that this will apply to both continuing and new SAAs. However, we know that there is still more work ahead. We will continue to work with the University to help students whose stipends may remain under these averages, and we encourage those students to reach out to us so we can engage in targeted outreach. Furthermore, we will continue to work to increase the stipends

¹ This chart does not include GAs or professional degrees, which will continue to be a focus of future research. Full document available [here](#)

² FY22 means the 2021-2022 academic year.

for our non-graduate-programmatic SAA positions and our graduate assistantships to over \$19,000 as well.

Also, of note, the “[For All](#)” fundraising campaign has raised over \$56 million dollars that will go towards funding over 200 graduate fellowships in the coming years. As these funds come in over future semesters, GPSG will continue to work with IU to ensure that they go towards funding competitive and properly compensated fellowships.

Offer Letters

One area that we have been focused on is address the lack of [transparency in acceptance letters for incoming graduate students](#). Accordingly, we have been discussing this issue with UGS Dean Daleke and working to prioritize specific programs in which graduate students have expressed concerns about their offer letters. Additionally, we are happy to say that the Provost will be working with GPSG and UGS to develop a template for graduate student offer letters moving forward. Our goal for these letters will be to (1) include specifics about the stipend amount in which a student will receive; (2) explain the full extent of the benefits attached with an SAA position (tuition remissions, insurance, etc.); and (3) provide a clear picture of the fees that a student will pay. This new template will serve as the minimum requirement for all graduate offer letters in the future.

Fees

Pursuant to several prior General Assembly Resolutions, GPSG is continuing to address concerns related to campus fees. Notably, the University has removed the drop/add course fee attached to class scheduling. Additionally, following our requests for a breakdown of the [Combined Mandatory Fee](#), IU has released the breakdown and has continued to raise awareness of how those taking online classes outside of Bloomington can receive a discounted fee. As a reminder, the deadline to petition for this [2021 Spring Fee Discount](#) is Monday, February 15, 2021.

Furthermore, we have been working closely with Dean Daleke to solidify the elimination of the unremittable fee³ across all of the programs. Accordingly, all of the Deans have agreed to phase out unremittable fees and we are working to get information on the potential timelines for the completion of this phase out. Additionally, the general assembly is taking up a resolution on Friday that calls for programs that will be unable to remove unremittable fees in the coming academic year, to embrace step-down reductions in the interim.

We are continuing to pursue discussions for initiating freezes on the collection of mandatory fees and the international fee, as well as striving to increase the information available about what

³ “Unremittable” fees were essentially a net reduction in the amount of a fee remission. Accordingly, a student would see tuition listed on the bursar bill as a charge and a fee remission as a credit, but the fee remission would only be 90% (in state) or 95% (out of state) of the tuition cost. The remaining 5-10% was the unremittable fee.

services these fees make possible. Accordingly, we are working closely with the Provost's Office to review the current state of mandatory fees and to outline potential next steps.

Health & Safety

COVID-19

The health and safety of graduate and professional students remains a primary concern as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, we have worked closely with Dean Daleke, Vice President for Research [Fred Cate](#), and our medical leaders at IU to continue to promote a safe and protected learning and research environment here at IUB. We are happy to report that as of this statement (1) there have been **zero** classroom transmission; (2) the graduate student community continues to have the fewest number of cases or student-to-student transmission in any setting; and (3) IUB's overall positivity rating remains incredibly low even in the face of record high testing. We worked closely with the University during the Fall Semester to help distribute information on [mitigation, voluntary, and symptomatic testing](#) – and we continue to work with the University to manage the [COVID-19 information](#) shared with students.

Even though it is unlikely that the State of Indiana will open vaccines up to student population until the summer or fall, the GPSG COVID-19 Ad-Hoc committee is proactively writing resolutions concerning issues related to COVID-19 vaccination on our campus to ensure they are integrated in our eventual plan. Accordingly, the committee has submitted a resolution to the General Assembly calling for IU to prioritize the vaccination of graduate student employees and Student Academic Appointees (SAAs) in educational or research roles who are expected to work in-person – as well as graduate students in programs that necessitate a greater in-person experience. Throughout our discussion with the University, they have often noted that they intend to treat our critical graduate student employees “like faculty” when it comes to distribution of the vaccine and GPSG looks forward to helping this become a reality. Furthermore, the committee is working on two surveys to analyze graduate student thoughts on COVID issues. During February, the COVID-19 Committee is running a [survey](#) on whether IU should require that all students receive the COVID-19 vaccine and what exemptions students believe should be offered. We also plan on utilizing these survey results to collaborate with [Dr. Carroll](#) to address specific student concerns related to the vaccine during his [Ask Aaron](#) events. In March, the committee will launch a survey about the research and classroom experience this past year, and what students would like to see addressed for the coming academic year.

Mental Health

We have also remained vigilant of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the mental health of our graduate and professional students. Accordingly, President Dakota Coates and our Health and Wellness Officer Jozie Barton have continued to provide critical and blunt feedback about the state

of our mental health resources on the [Graduate and Professional Student Mental Health Task Force](#). As a major voice on the task force, GPSG has called for bolstering the marketing of our mental health resources, developing Canvas/Syllabus inserts, boosting funds for counseling, removing perceived and actual barriers to access, and collaborating with IU Studios to continue the destigmatization campaign around mental health. The GPSG General Assembly also passed a [Resolution to Enhance Student Mental Health Resources on Campus](#) which highlighted to the Task Force and the University specific areas and ways in which they can bolster our existing resources. One piece of this, is that we hope to continue expanding the virtual and online resources available to our students – and the current plan is to retain several of the virtual options (such as Zoom CAPS sessions) in the post-COVID world.

GPSG was also an early supporter of establishing [Wellness Days](#) to account for the loss of breaks in the COVID-19 academic calendars, to ensure that our students are given the opportunity to take a mental and physical breather throughout the Spring Semester. Accordingly, IU has established three wellness days (Feb. 16, March 24, Apr. 22) on which most programs will not hold classes. For programs that have accreditation barriers, predominately our professional programs, we continue to work with their Deans to find creative solutions that allow for them to either implement the wellness days in full form or implement a similar alternative. To this end, the GPSG Health and Wellness Committee has submitted a resolution to the General Assembly calling for all programs to fully implement the wellness days such that programs will ensure their students receive an actual break from their academic and employment commitments.

Food Security

GPSG continues to be a major force in the area of food security. In October, the General Assembly passed a [Resolution to Address Food Insecurity on Campus](#) – and we have worked to continue institutionalizing our fight against hunger. We worked with the IU Foundation to have Food Insecurity be the primary focus of their Giving-Tuesday campaign in December. Accordingly, we were able to help raise thousands of dollars for the [Crimson Cupboard](#) and the winter duration of the Emergency Meal Project. Furthermore, our efforts helped highlight the issue on all campuses across the IU system, in which we have been able to direct tens-of-thousands of dollars into food security initiatives. We are also currently collaborating with the IU Student Trustee Molly Connor to establish food security as a critical focus for the Student Association (AUSA) and we continue to work closely with several members of the Board of Trustees to develop new ways for IU to tackle this challenge.

Academics

We continue to be heavily involved in discussions addressing how the university will manage the academic calendar. While we will continue to advocate for the greatest degree of online, distanced class access during COVID – we understand that a notable portion of our students would prefer to return to an in-person format – and thus, we continue to advocate for a flexible academic experience that supports students whether they are attending virtually or in-person. We will

continue to push the University to enforce their health and safety guidelines – and have worked closely with any student who feels as though they are not being provided adequate academic, research, or employment support to resolve their concerns on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, we have continued to work with UGS to provide flexibility in the G901 and doctoral dissertation context. We are hopeful that one of the post-COVID changes that we can keep will be allowing for our doctoral students to retain the virtual flexibility of their defenses when needed.

Additionally, we have worked closely with UGS Dean Daleke and other program Deans to ensure that students receive reliable [access to course information](#). Accordingly, several programs have implemented new procedures to ensure that students are able to access information well before the first day of class, and we continue to pursue new avenues to promote greater digital access to classroom resources.

University Policy

We are continuing to work on establishing more uniform student leave policies across our academic programs. Thus, we have worked with the Graduate Faculty Council to update the academic bulletin requiring that all graduate programs establish school-level leave policies for students and to clearly communicate all procedures for taking this leave.

GPSG has also taken swift action in light of the reprehensible actions of [former-professor McGibbon](#). Accordingly, the GPSG General Assembly met in November to outline an assortment of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct policy concerns that the representatives had – from which a small drafting committee developed a [Resolution to Address Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct](#). President Coates has worked closely with the leadership of the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE);⁴ the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty & Academic Affairs, and the IU General Counsel’s Office to address concerns related to transparency, preventative mechanisms, and informational awareness related to our Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct procedures. GPSG is working closely with the aforementioned offices to integrate these protections into the [UA-03](#) University Policy following the end of the interim policy term.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these policy changes and initiatives, please contact your GPSG Representative or email iugpsg@indiana.edu.

Sincerely,

The 2020-2021 GPSG Executive Committee

⁴ The department that oversees IU’s Title IX policies.