

September 28, 2023

The Honorable Joey Andrews
Room S-887, Cora B. Anderson House Office Building
124 North Capitol Avenue, Lansing, MI 48933
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Representative Andrews;

Prior to Thursday's action on Senate Bill 185, we wanted to again share our feedback on this legislation, which we believe will have significant impact on our academic and research missions, and in the case of House Bill 4497, dramatically change our relationship with student-athletes.

As a public research university, our mission is to address global challenges through research and teach the next generation of scientific thought leaders. These graduate students train and learn to be researchers; and how to be part of a successful research team. They are taught these essential skills as research assistants as they progress toward their advanced degrees, while being mentored by their faculty advisors who guide them through every step as they learn and hone the academic, technical and social skills needed to be successful in their field of study. They choose their mentor, faculty advisor, whom they believe will help prepare them to succeed in their academic field of study. In many cases, this mentorship lasts throughout their academic journey including their dissertation defense. Throughout their education, our students have access to some of the world's best laboratories and libraries as they work towards their academic and professional goals. Because of this academic training and education, which can be years depending on the degree, when they graduate, they will be capable of working on their own, but until that time, their primary experience is educational.

We believe the relationship between the student-mentor graduate student research assistant (GSRA) and faculty is more analogous to a relationship between a student and mentor than one between an entry-level employee and manager. A graduate student's research experience typically lasts about 1000 days, just about 5 years. During that time, the student learns what is needed to be a capable, independent professional. The time spent acquiring knowledge in their field is critical to a student's education and the research work they have chosen. They do this so that they can prepare for and write their dissertation in order to secure the best position after they graduate, one that will ensure they are able to translate their hard-fought efforts in gaining a graduate degree to be able to positively impact the global challenges we face. When those five years are up our students have been taught and learned more about their thesis topic than anyone else.

The University of Michigan strives to recruit the best graduate research students throughout the world. It is in the best interests of us all – faculty, students, staff and graduate employees, graduate students – to provide not only tuition, but a benefits package that is competitive with the best public universities in the country. Doing so ensures we attract and retain the very best graduate student scholars in the world – and support their ability to thrive here.

Some of the key supports provided to GSRA's are the following:

- Most GSRA's are appointed at 50% effort, which is the equivalent of 16-20 hours per week
- Total pay for two, four-month semesters at 50% effort: \$25,980 (equivalent to \$77,940 full time annual pay)
- LS&A example of a tuition waiver: Up to \$13,596 per semester for in-state students, up to \$27,360 per semester for out-of-state students

- Childcare subsidy for student parents, per semester:
 - \$3,567 for one child
 - \$5,230 for two children
 - \$6,896 for three or more children
- Comprehensive health insurance: no monthly premium

Again, we want to ensure there is an open dialogue as we balance education and workforce needs and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you as you consider this important bill.

Best,



Chris Kolb
Vice President for Government Relations

September 28, 2023

The Honorable Doug Wozniak
Room N-993, Cora B. Anderson House Office Building
124 North Capitol Avenue, Lansing, MI 48933
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Representative Wozniak;

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Best,



Chris Kolb
Vice President for Government Relations

Laurie K. McCauley • Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

September 28, 2023

Dear Representative Andrews,

I am writing on behalf of the University of Michigan regarding Senate Bill 185 and House Bill 4497 and the academic impact of expanding bargaining to graduate research students.

Our graduate students are instrumental in the educational mission of our university. We care about them deeply. Our commitment to creating a flourishing environment for them and for research generally are, we believe, evident in our competitive position in the graduate school landscape and our consistently top-ranked research endeavors.

With this letter, I hope to convey our conception of how graduate student research assistants (GSRAs) fit into our academic mission, and the potential educational and practical ramifications of changing that role.

At the outset, it must be noted that including GSRAs in a collective bargaining unit is not a matter of simply codifying their extant role here; it fundamentally alters the dynamics of each individual GSRA's education and their relationship with the university.

Drawing from a deep well of faculty expertise and sophisticated labs and equipment, graduate students produce valuable research; however, as students, they are also learning the norms and nuances of research practice, lab dynamics, and discipline-specific professional conduct. As students, they are encouraged to learn through experimentation and mistakes are a necessary part of their education. Dead ends and unfruitful results are part of all research, and this is especially true of students' work in any context. This is part of the learning process our university excels at fostering.

Other types of employees who join the university's workforce after completing their professional training are expected to arrive as competent professionals in their vocations, and as employees in any enterprise, provide a net positive value shortly after onboarding; our graduate students are expected to arrive with no more than the character traits that promise a fruitful future of academic study. They can and do provide value through their research at the university, but they do so as part of an educational ecosystem where

faculty guidance is essential. At later stages in their studies, graduate students are emerging masters of their craft, and they may partner with faculty on major projects; this level of competency is the goal of graduate work, and achieving it takes years of persistence, research practice, and mentorship. While still students at this point, graduate researchers begin bolstering their portfolio of published work in preparation for the commencement of their careers as professionals.

In short, a GSRA's research is an elemental aspect of their education, not a byproduct of it.

I am also concerned about how a bargained employer-employee relationship would alter the paradigm of incoming students in a way that threatens the bedrock of advanced studies on our campus. New graduate students are (currently) not looking at graduate study prospects using the criteria one would apply when hunting for a new job; at highly competitive research institutions such as the University of Michigan, students seek out faculty based on specialized research that aligns with their interests, and they choose the institution based on that particular faculty member. This matching process, and the collegial relationship built on it, are the keys to the recruitment of the very best faculty and staff.

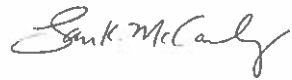
Of course, we recognize the value that GSRA's provide through their research, and want to both recruit the very best graduate students and be sure their needs are met during their studies here. To achieve those goals, GSRA's, who are most commonly appointed at 50% effort, the equivalent of 16-20 hours per week, receive a package that includes:

- Approximately \$38,970 in funding for PhD students each year. This is an academic stipend, not contingent on specific metrics or teaching, but part of each PhD's funding package.
- A university-paid tuition waiver that varies by college. As an example, for graduate students in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, the tuition waiver is \$13,596 per semester for in-state students, up to \$27,360 per semester for out-of-state students.
- Childcare subsidy for student parents, per semester:
 - o \$3,567 for one child
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I hope this letter provides some clarity and context about graduate students' crucial role in our endeavors on campus. The components that make academia a unique societal

institution also make understanding the costs and benefits of policy undergirding our many interlocking systems no easy task. I truly appreciate your efforts to take the academic perspective into consideration as you navigate how best to ensure the people of Michigan flourish. That is a mission dear to us both.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie K. McCauley".

Laurie K. McCauley
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs