

COGS

Campaign to Organize Graduate Students

PAY IT BACK!



33% of Graduate Employees Have Poverty Appointments

“My student loan debt is staggering. Over four years I’ve borrowed over \$60,000 to supplement the \$8800 that I “earn” from Iowa annually. This semester I am adjuncting four classes at Kirkwood and Cornell OUTSIDE of what is supposed to be a FULL TIME status at the University of Iowa. I’ve done that nearly every semester as a graduate student.

And my health insurance, as a single parent with children is \$422 a month... if I had a partner, even if they weren’t affiliated with the university, my health insurance would be over \$100 a month cheaper. How many potential academic minds are squeezed out of graduate school because they are a single parent? Or because they didn’t have a partner or family to supplement their living expenses for five or six years? Who does a salary and benefit package like this allow to even think about grad school... and who does it exclude entirely?”



Kate Kedley, TA, College of Education



Lamar Barber, TA, Studio Art

“We’ve already lost so many to this debt, let’s not lose any more.

I’d rather not talk about how working as a quarter time teaching assistant, attending classes, and working a part time job put a lot of stress on me. Instead I’d like to talk about what led me to go further into debt. It was twenty hours. Twenty hours is the amount of sleep I got per week last semester.

After calculating the cost of living and receiving my “award”, which I refer to as my debt letter, it was disheartening to see that additional fees were withdrawn from it. Every semester graduate students dig deep and make a commitment to remain full time students. Some of us decide to return home and become full time employees to refrain from borrowing more debt, but those who return home stand a chance of never coming back, thus adding to the statistics for graduate school dropouts.”

“I came to the University of Iowa as a Dean’s Graduate Research Fellow, with the promise of a full tuition and stipend package in exchange for three years of teaching and two years of research obligation. To my knowledge, the issue of fees was never addressed in my offer letter.

Because I registered for mentored research last summer, the total amount of fees I have paid in the last year is \$1,136.25. To some, \$1,100 dollars annually may seem like a trivial amount in the total cost of an education. However, as a single parent on a limited budget, \$1,100 dollars could go a long way.

The \$1100 dollars in fees I paid last year could have been spent on: 4 and a half months worth of health insurance for myself and my son, 5 months of after school childcare, 3 months worth of groceries, 7 months of utility bills, a full month’s rent and deposit, OR transportation costs for the entire year.”



Nicole Filoon, TA, Sociology

JOIN THE PAY IT BACK CAMPAIGN

- 1) **Read and download COGS' White Paper, "Financial Insecurity for Graduate Students Contributes to Debt and Poverty" at our website cogs.org**
- 2) **Contact COGS at 319-337-5074 to join FEES actions taking place in your department.**

University of Iowa graduate students say low teaching wages and high fees are keeping talented young people from considering higher education.

Mandatory fees, which have increased 500 percent in 14 years, eat into grad students' meager earnings, COGS President Jeannette Gabriel said.

One reason for low pay is many UI departments provide only quarter-time or one-third-time teaching appointments to grad students, she said.

UI Graduate College Dean John Keller said the UI has encouraged departments to offer half-time appointments when feasible, but some programs offer quarter-time or one-third-time positions to spread limited resources to more students.

"Currently graduate assistants at a 25 percent appointment or greater, receive full tuition at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) rates and benefits allocations," Keller said in an email to The Gazette. Students, like Kedley, who are in the College of Education are assessed a tuition supplement, for which they don't receive a scholarship, he said.

Some universities, including the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Oregon State University and the University of California, have waived or reduced fees for grad students, COGS reported.

COGS has asked the UI to reduce fees for several years, Keller said, but the university's position is that all students — undergraduate and graduate — pay fees to support university facilities and services.

University of Iowa grad students protest fees and low wages

By Erin Jordan, [The Gazette](#) | Published: August 30 2014 |

UI grad students protest fees, working conditions

By Michael Kadrie | [Daily Iowan Staff](#) | August 29, 2014

Fees are mandatory and include a \$225 fee to access the UI Campus Recreation & Wellness Center and a \$60 professional enhancement fee, which was added in the 2010-11 academic year. COGS members complained that the university has not provided detailed information on the specific use for these funds.

The UI is also moving away from a system that guarantees tenure and is increasing the number of 25 percent grad-student appointments, or 10 hours of work a week, Gabriel said. She worries these worsening conditions will discourage people from seeking a graduate-student education at the UI.



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