



*Briefing Paper: Collective Bargaining for Graduate Assistants*

## Support Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Rights

### Who are graduate assistants?

- A graduate assistant is an enrolled student employed by the university to teach, research, or perform administrative duties essential to the running of the university.
  - **Mean time-to-degree can be between five and thirteen years, depending on the field.**  
**Graduate Assistants often have families and children dependents, which makes their minimal pay and stipends that much more of a problem.**

### What kinds of work do graduate students perform?

- Teaching assistants may teach classes, lead discussion and review sessions, hold office hours, administer learning management systems, and/or grade assignments and exams.
- Research assistants are integral members of research teams who discuss research questions and methodologies, run experiments and do other forms of research, draft papers, and perform administrative work that keeps research enterprises running.
- Administrative assistants answer phones and email, collect and prepare data, manage information systems, and help with course scheduling and advising.

### Do assistantships count towards a grad student's degree?

- Oftentimes, much of the work done by graduate employees is **unrelated to degree requirements and students' specific fields of study.**
  - Assistantship supervisors are not necessarily the faculty research advisors who determine degree progress; often, grads are asked to work beyond the stipulated 20 hrs/week. Assistantships can sometimes slow students' progress toward their degrees.

### Are assistantship stipends adequate?

- Graduate assistant stipends are far below living wage standards, **forcing grads into poor housing conditions and food insecurity.**
  - For example, at UMCP, the minimum grad employee salary is \$14K less than the MIT living wage standard for the region for a single person household. At UMBC, the minimum grad employee salary is \$20k for Masters students – *less than half* the fulltime living wage of \$41,054 per year

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before taxes for a single person household in Maryland. For graduate assistants with dependents, the situation is even more dire.

- UMCP consistently ranks last in graduate employee minimum stipends among other Big 10 institutions (many of which are unionized).

**What avenues do graduate employees have to share their concerns?**

- The meet-and-confer process established in 2010, which requires semesterly meetings between GA's and University administrators, is not working – **University administrators do not engage with graduate employees in good faith** and systematically minimize graduate employee concerns. At UMBC, there were no official meet-and-confer meetings for several years before 2022-23.



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