

Approved GEU Bargaining Platform Planks

Presented below are proposed planks of the GEU platform and their basic objectives. The planks that receive majority approval by the members present at this GMM will be adopted; together, they shall comprise the GEU Bargaining Platform.

Anti-Harassment, Anti-Discrimination (Article 7)

The university's current anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy and its enforcement are unable to protect graduate students. Lack of protections and inadequate transparency about Employee rights and University responsibilities mean that graduate students do not even know who exactly to talk to or what evidence to bring for grievances. Our goal is to strengthen protections against discrimination and harassment and increase transparency in the process.

Parking/Transportation (Employee Rights- Article 9)

We've all experienced the parking situation on campus – if you get to campus after 9 am, good luck finding a spot! For most of us, being on campus and in our offices or labs is critical to our work. However, parking is often not a given for graduate students, and we feel that this needs to change.

In this year's contract bargaining, our overarching goal is to make on-campus parking and transportation more accessible and affordable for graduate students.

Workload (Article 13)

TAs have been required to work unreasonable hours, impeding research and other professional goals. We propose to address the issue by setting time limits, defining work, outlining work expectations, and describing steps to defuse overwork issues. Limits will be set on the number of hours that a TA can be reasonably expected to work in a day, week, and semester. Work will be defined to ensure that compensation is given for all time spent in service of education. Forms will also be provided as optional resources to foster a mentoring relationship between TAs and faculty. Lastly, a process to address overwork issues with faculty will be created as an optional alternative to filing a grievance. The procedures will also ensure that the GEU is notified if overwork issues are escalated.

Collaborating for Change Professional Learning Communities (Article 15)

At our predominantly white institution, there is a lack of concerted support for individuals (especially with marginalized identities) in teaching, and especially in courses centering on privilege, power and oppression. We want the university to fund the Collaborating for Change learning community that GTAs have started this fall. The goal of the Collaborating for Change Learning Community is to provide training, resources, support, community, & networking opportunities for GTAs teaching or shadowing courses that challenge, critique and resist systems of privilege, power and oppression, and also more generally to improve awareness and navigation of power dynamics in the classroom.

Parental Leave (Article 18)

The parental accommodation policy aims to support graduate student Employees by providing an increased paid leave (from one week in the current contract) and an extension of deadlines and time limits to degree following the birth or adoption of a child under six. This plank is

modified to extend the amount of time allotted for the parental accommodation period and to separate this paid leave from any student absences that are medically necessary due to pregnancy, childbirth or other illness covered through the medical leave of absence policy.

Tuition Waiver, Stipends, Annual Raises (Articles 19 & 20)

As graduate students, we take on a significant portion of the teaching burden of undergraduates (the largest revenue source for the university at 30%). We carry out research for grants (the second largest source of revenue for the university at 15%). We are subject matter experts in our respective fields, yet we are not competitively compensated for our labor. As a result, graduate student assistants at Michigan State University are increasingly unable to afford to live in the area that we work. Our salaries are not keeping up with inflation nationally or housing inflation locally.

We want the majority of graduate employees to not be severely rent burdened according to the HUD definition. Our stipends aren't going up fast enough compared to housing costs, and there are limited affordable housing options. We don't want grad students to lose ground in their pay each year. Furthermore, our compensation should be competitive with our peers at institutions like University of Michigan, Northwestern, and Wayne State.

Health Care (Article 21)

The focus of the healthcare plank is to protect our existing healthcare benefits while also closing loopholes to improve coverage and the standard of living for graduate students and their families. Our priorities include more affordable dependent care, flexibility in choosing primary care providers, improved and more affordable dental and vision options, more clarity in mental health coverage, and better oversight and communication through the formation of a graduate student healthcare advisory council.

Affordable Housing

With the phased closure of Spartan Village, affordable on-campus housing options no longer exist for graduate students. Rental rates for current on-campus options (1855 Place, University Village, and Owen Hall) exceed 50% of graduate assistant income. These existing options are not solely for graduate students, meaning they are not conducive for quiet study and may result in teaching assistants living near their students.

Although some units have been kept at Spartan Village for graduate students who demonstrate financial need, information about these apartments is not transparent on the LiveOn website and to incoming graduate students.

First-year international graduate students especially suffer at the lack of housing options as they are often moving from abroad and would otherwise have to navigate the off-campus housing market. The institution argues they are competing with off-campus housing markets, but we found that 1855 Place is more expensive than comparable apartments in the area; Spartan Village on the other hand was the most affordable option. We argue that MSU has a responsibility and opportunity to provide affordable housing for its students.

We argue that that MSU has an opportunity to attract graduate students to the institution by providing safe, accessible, and affordable housing options specifically for graduate students and

to keep graduate students living on campus. We ask the institution for the following: (1) Provide subsidized rates and/or rates affordable with graduate assistant salaries; (2) Form a pool for international graduate students using funds from the international student fee (if it cannot be waived); (3) Provide a moving stipend for incoming graduate students living on campus; (4) Dedicate units in Spartan Village for three years for graduate students and publicize the availability of these units; (5) Keep graduate students in mind in future research and development of on-campus housing.

Childcare

A lot of graduate students with kids need to depend on family members for financial support, and it can be a real barrier to graduate student success. We believe that MSU should support graduate parents, but instead during the last bargaining an MSU rep said that grad students should “make better decisions about their families” and maybe grad students “shouldn’t put meat in their spaghetti sauce.” This is unacceptable, and we want to call on the university to provide a 100% childcare subsidy to support the parents in our grad student community.

Diversity Positions

The work of diversity, equity, and inclusion too often falls on graduate students as unpaid labor. To remedy this, we therefore are asking the hiring of teaching assistants in each college to do this work. With paid TA positions, Michigan State University would greatly increase its capacity to implement initiatives on behalf of the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), individual colleges, or other projects designed for specific departments and interest groups. Currently, departments still vary widely with respect to their progress on issues of equity and there is need for improved coordination. We envision that these positions could:

- Coordinate activities across and within departments, sharing best practices;
- Support the development and implementation of the Office of Institutional Equity strategic plan;
- Hold open office hours and be accountable to the needs of students;
- Attend different committee meetings across departments as needed;
- Assess evidence-based on successful equitable practices and work to align them with other University activities.

International Student Fee

We have two goals here: 1) Employer will remove the University per-term international graduate student fee, and will not impose any new fees in its place. Any services or programs supposedly funded by this fee will still operate. 2) SEVIS fee will be reimbursed.

Language Assessment

The primary focus of the language assessment plank is a significant increase in the transparency of the MSU Speaking Test that serves as the primary assessment of the language proficiency for international teaching assistant. Beyond the main issue of transparency, our goals are the following: 1) Improve the environment under which are the international TAs evaluated 2) Protect international students from accent-based discrimination 3) Secure clear conditions under which Speaking Test can be waived 4) Increase the frequency of offered testing dates and resolve funding difficulties associated with ITA Language Support Courses, AAE 451 & AAE 452

Support for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) Students

We want to ensure that the university protects and supports DACA students and their unique needs around job permits, etc. The administration has shown a clear lack of understanding about DACA and therefore has not been able to adequately support graduate students with DACA status, instead relying on the students to educate them about their situation. The goal is to insert contract language that addresses the unique needs of these students.

Relationship Violence & Sexual Misconduct

It is currently MSU's policy that graduate assistants must report any allegations of relationship violence or sexual misconduct (RVSM) to the Office of Institutional Equity and to the police, with or without the consent of the person coming forward. This is in spite of conflicting evidence about whether sweeping policies like these actually benefit survivors, and whether they may in fact cause harm. At several other universities, including at University of Michigan, only select employees such as coaches and department chairs are designated as mandatory reporters of RVSM, and this list does not include graduate teaching assistants. This approach satisfies federal Title IX requirements and allows survivors to seek support from teaching assistants without automatically triggering a report. We will advocate for survivor-centric reforms to the current RVSM reporting procedures, and against the designation of graduate assistants as mandatory reporters. Whether or not TAs are required to report, we will advocate that MSU provide graduate students with adequate training for how to sensitively handle a disclosure of relationship violence or sexual misconduct in a way that minimizes harm and empowers survivors.

Technical Changes:

Term of Agreement (Article 1):

Because of the high turnover of graduate students, we would like to reduce our contract cycle down to three years instead of four, so that we may build more institutional memory around contract negotiations.

Recognition (Article 4):

The purpose of this change is to ensure that our bargaining unit properly reflects graduate workers at the university. No graduate student employee of MSU who is legally able to join the bargaining unit should be barred from doing so. We propose to define our bargaining unit to include all graduate assistants, except those prevented from inclusion by law. We propose to define our unit broadly, making specific exclusions as required by law. We propose to determine and state specifically positions with duties which can be included, making clear that these positions are part, but not all of the included positions.

Grievance (Article 26):

The purpose of the Grievance Process language is to allow employees enough time for reflection and evidence-gathering between the time that they experience a contract violation and the time they have to file a grievance. We believe that it is important to give a longer look-back period to grievances related to harassment/discrimination because (a) the sensitive, personal context of these situations makes evidence-gathering take more time (b) well-founded fears of retaliation mean that employees should be able to wait until the semester is over before filing a grievance.

Orientations (Union Rights- Article 6)

Because the union is so crucial to the benefits of graduate students, and orientation is one of the main ways new students learn about GEU, we are requesting that thirty (30) days prior to the start of each academic year, the University will provide the Union with the names and telephone numbers of contact persons responsible for scheduling each appointing unit's orientation. Each semester, upon request of the Union, each appointing unit will make thirty (30) minutes available to the Union during the aforementioned orientations. The Union meeting will be scheduled in the same room, if possible, or with directions to the new room in the same building. Further, the appointing unit shall not require employee attendance at other programming or work-related meetings during the time available to the Union under this Section. The purpose of this time will be to inform Employees about the Union's function, to explain dues and service fee deductions, to recruit departmental stewards, to discuss current bargaining status, and to answer new Employee questions consistent with contract provisions and the law.

Lab Safety Training

Many GTAs do work that requires them to work in hazardous environments and/or with hazardous materials. Many GTAs report having not received proper training in dealing with such environments/materials; more damningly, others report not receiving the proper equipment to deal with such environments/materials safely.

Employees have a right to safe working conditions. Forcing GTAs to work in hazardous environments without training presents a hazard to both employees and the students the students they teach. The Employer must takes steps to ensure that in all such work environments that GTAs are given proper training as part of their work duties.