

## TA RA GA Stipend Survey Report – A message from the Vice President

Hello,

I trust this email finds you in good health. I am reaching out to provide you with an update, which is likely to be the final one, regarding the TA RA GA Stipend Survey conducted by Graduate Student Assembly (GSA).

As background information, a group of graduate students brought to the attention of the GSA leadership the financial challenges they were facing due to the limited stipend amount. In response, the TA RA GA Stipend Working Group was formed to investigate and address the concerns raised by these students regarding stipend amounts. To investigate this, the TA RA GA Working group consisting of Mithin Nehrubabu (Chair), Nimisha Pocharam, Azharul Islam, Bhanu Garg, and myself, prepared a survey and sent it out to the graduate student population of UTD to collect data in the hopes of discovering the issues that stems from the current stipend amount.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the graduate students who took the time out of their busy schedules to participate in the survey and provide us with invaluable information. The majority of responses received were detailed and went beyond the single-response questions, providing valuable insights and perspectives. Your contributions have been immensely helpful in better understanding the situation at hand. With the information that was gathered, and with just enough data to provide reasoning, the GSA TA RA GA Stipend Committee was created by the approval of the GSA leadership.

The committee's purpose was to process and analyze all the data collected from the survey and to create a comprehensive report that would provide a detailed analysis. This report would be shared with relevant administration figures who could utilize the data to address the stipend concerns. The TA RA GA Stipend Committee was comprised of members from the original working group, with Mithin serving again as the chair, and a new addition, Mr. Josue Katchy, a fellow graduate student who was enthusiastic about contributing to the committee's efforts. The committee worked diligently, holding regular weekly meetings and even convening on weekends during the Spring of 2023, to compile and finalize the final TA RA GA stipend report.

The report focused specifically on PhD TA RA GA stipend-receiving students, providing detailed breakdowns of their academic, work, overall well-being, and financial situations. The committee recognized that an increase in stipend would greatly benefit these students and suggested a specific amount that could help alleviate their financial burdens. Additionally, the report included an extensive list of feedback provided by students, outlining the challenges they faced due to financial burdens.

The finalized report has been shared with the Deans of all schools, the President of UTD, and other relevant administrators who may find the information useful in making future decisions that could benefit the affected students. With the distribution of the report, the work of the TA RA GA Stipend Committee has come to a conclusion. If you are interested in reading the report, please feel free to contact Mithin Nehrubabu, Bhanu Garg, or me, and we can arrange meetings for review (preferably after finals!).

So, what's next?

Indeed, the work of addressing this concern is ongoing, and it is crucial to continue advocating and providing assistance to the UTD administration even as the current leadership's term comes to an end, including my term as Vice President. The responsibility of keeping the pressure on to address this issue will fall to the next leadership, and it is important to ensure that the momentum is maintained in advocating for the needs of the affected students. Rest assured, I am committed to supporting the continuity of these efforts and will be available to provide any necessary assistance during the transition to the next leadership.

The question is, what can **you** do to help?

I strongly encourage you to **attend the monthly GSA general body meetings**. These meetings provide an excellent platform for the leadership to hear your concerns and ensure that the graduate students' voices are heard. It is crucial for the leadership to continue serving the students it represents, and attending these meetings will give you an opportunity to voice your concerns and be part of the decision-making process. Your active participation and engagement can help shape the future of the graduate student community, and I urge you to take advantage of this opportunity.

It is important to **hold the leadership accountable for their responsibilities**. During my term as Vice President, I have encountered instances where some members of the leadership did not fulfill their roles as expected, which required the President and me to take on additional responsibilities to ensure that GSA continues to serve its constituents effectively. To address this issue, the Parliamentary committee has introduced additional articles and created a bylaws document. However, it is ultimately up to you, as a member of the graduate student community, to hold these officers accountable. You have every right to voice your concerns and ensure that the leadership addresses them! I urge you to attend the GSA general meetings, which occur once a month, and make your concerns heard. Your active participation in these meetings can play a vital role in holding the leadership accountable and shaping the direction of GSA. Please note that our final meeting is scheduled for this Friday, and your attendance and input would be greatly appreciated.

It's time to **exercise your right to vote!** Today is the last day to cast your vote for the representatives who will represent your interests in the next leadership. I urge you to participate in the voting process and make your voice heard. GSA will provide you with a final reminder and information about the candidates running for GSA positions. **Voting closes today at 5 pm CST**, so be sure to cast your vote before the deadline. Your vote matters and can help shape the future of GSA. Thank you for your active participation in the democratic process and ensuring that your interests are represented in the graduate student community.

In conclusion, I want to encourage you not to give up, but to keep fighting for your rights. As I processed the responses from all of you, I was deeply saddened to learn about the challenging situations some of our fellow graduate students face due to financial circumstances. Please know that the Committee, including myself, has read every single response and made sure the message was conveyed in the TA RA GA Stipend Survey Report. Your voices matter and your concerns are important. Don't lose hope, but keep pushing forward to ensure that the GSA leadership continues to represent its constituents, which includes all of you. Together, we can work towards positive changes that benefit graduate students as a whole.

Thank you for your support and dedication to advocating for your rights. As I say goodbye, I hope that I have been able to live up to the expectations set by the leaders before me, and perhaps even set a standard for the incoming leadership.

Keep on keeping on.

**Don Wijesinghe**

Vice President | Graduate Student Assembly

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