

December 11, 2017

RE: White Paper, Graduate Student Pay

Dear CU Leadership and Academic Futures,

This white paper is concerned with addressing graduate student pay, a topic that has already been on the radar for the campus. However, we would like to re-emphasize a few key considerations for why this topic remains so important. We recognize that the campus leadership has increased the graduate stipend amounts (6.5% and 5.9%) over the last two years, and this is appreciated. Nonetheless, these increases fall far short of meeting the goal of a self-sufficiency standard for the Boulder region. It is our intention here to envision a campus that compensates its graduate student work force with fair wages so that we can recruit and retain a talented and diverse student body who are enabled to strive for excellence.

The CU Boulder CRC (Committee on Rights and Compensation) provides a very clear picture of the numbers involved here (see [bouldercrc.org](http://bouldercrc.org)). Their carefully presented research is transparent, draws from a diverse set of robust sources, and spells out how to determine a self-sufficiency wage accurately in this current time period for Boulder. Some of the salient points from the CRC's research demonstrate that CU's graduate students are paid only two thirds of a self-sufficiency standard, and that this is among the lowest compensation compared to all other PAC-12 institutions. We strongly encourage CU to do more to make up this difference. Our graduate students are facing very real and difficult living situations to pay for basic needs including housing and food, on top of the substantial fees CU students must pay out of pocket.

One part of the problem is that the cost of living in Boulder has risen so sharply and the compensation has not kept pace, for a long time. Living outside of Boulder does not solve this problem given that rents are not so much cheaper outside of Boulder, and the added transportation costs and commuting difficulty make this option unfeasible. CU could offer more affordable housing in Boulder to assist graduate students, but even if these plans move forward they are likely several years away, and they do not improve the situation for the current cohorts of students in need. In agreement with the CRC, we strongly urge the CU leadership to set compensation according to the self-sufficiency guidelines (e.g., the Colorado Center for Law and Policy) and NOT include tuition remission in this calculation. Tuition remission is not a form of income that students can use to meet the needs of living in the Boulder region.

Lastly, CU compensation directly affects our ability to recruit and retain talented and diverse students. Many of my colleagues, myself included, have watched top ranked prospective students not accept offers to attend CU after they learn about the low compensation as well as experience the low morale around this issue when they interview and meet our current students. Furthermore, when the compensation is significantly below the self-sufficiency standard, this acts as a barrier to students from lower-income or disadvantaged backgrounds. This trend is

noted in a recent correspondence in *Nature*, "PhD students: living wage key to diversity," from Barber et al. (2017), who responded to an article that details the rising trend of PhD students seeking second and third jobs to earn a living wage during graduate school:

"In our view, your report on side jobs for scientists paints a naive and insensitive picture of the financial and social realities facing many graduate students and other early-career researchers ([Nature 549, 297–299; 2017](#)). For a group already burdened with enormous undergraduate debt, we find it irresponsible to imply that success in graduate school could hinge on having two jobs.

In reality, academia is not populated solely by young graduate students who are supported by wealthy families. Low graduate-student pay is a real barrier to a career in research, particularly for underrepresented groups and those who have child-care commitments. To help make research attractive to a diverse community, you should give more voice to those promoting serious structural solutions that will resolve financial burdens and inequities in science education."

We wholeheartedly agree with this statement. It is vital to CU's missions surrounding inclusive excellence that we offer fair compensation to enable talented individuals from all backgrounds to pursue graduate study here.

Sincerely,

Dr. Valerie J. McKenzie

Associate Professor/ Interim Chair of Graduate Studies  
Dept. of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado  
Phone: 303-492-7557  
Email: [valerie.mckenzie@colorado.edu](mailto:valerie.mckenzie@colorado.edu)

**Additional Signatures:**

Alexander Cruz (EBIO) Professor and President's Teaching Scholar  
Noah Fierer (EBIO/ CIRES) Associate Professor  
Scott Taylor (EBIO) Assistant Professor  
Rebecca Safran (EBIO) Associate Professor  
Brett Melbourne (EBIO) Associate Professor  
Javan Carter (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Tim Korpita (EBIO) Ph.D Student

Matthew Bitters (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Alexandra Alexiev (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Hannah Holland-Moritz (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Mathew T. Sharples (EBIO) Ph.D. Candidate  
Travis McDevitt-Galles (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Margaret Habib (EBIO) M.A. Student  
J. Harrison Carpenter (EBIO) Senior Instructor  
Zachary Root (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Christine Avena (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Wynne Moss (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Claire Karban (EBIO) Master's Student  
Tobin Hammer (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Tyler Square (EBIO) former Ph.D. Student  
Tim Seastedt, (EBIO) Professor  
William D. Bowman (EBIO) Professor and Associate Chair for Graduate Studies  
Erin Tripp (EBIO & Museum), Assistant Professor & Curator  
Brian C. Sechler (EBIO) Master's Student  
Kristin L. Barton (EBIO) Master's Student  
Angela N. Hansen (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Samuel Flaxman (EBIO), Associate Professor  
Deane Bowers (EBIO), Professor and Chair EBIO  
Kendi Davies (EBIO), Associate Professor  
Chelsea Pretz (EBIO), Ph.D. Student  
Luis Allende (EBIO), Ph.D. Student  
Sukuan Liu (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Bridget Chalifour (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Chiara Forrester (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Katharine Suding (EBIO) Professor  
Caroline Havrilla (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Adam Solon (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Jeffry B. Mitton (EBIO) Professor  
Angela Oliverio (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
John L. Darcy (EBIO) former Ph.D. Student  
Lara Vimercati (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Kelsey Elwood (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
David Zonana (EBIO) Ph.D Student  
Molly McDermott (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Christopher M Steenbock (EBIO) PhD Student  
Sean Streich (EBIO) Master's Student  
Anna Spiers (EBIO) Ph.D. Student  
Michael Breed (EBIO) Professor  
Pieter Johnson (EBIO) Associate Professor  
Silas Tittes (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Jacob Heen Lowenstein (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Kathryn Grabenstein (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Erik Funk (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Alix Knight (EBIO) BA/MA Student

Julie Larson (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Gaurav Vaidya (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Lisa Corwin (EBIO) Assistant Professor

Carly Anderson Stewart (EBIO) PhD Student

Christy McCain (EBIO/CU Museum) Associate Professor

Lisa Natale (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

James Massey (EBIO) Ph.D Student

Cheryl Pinzone (EBIO) Science Teaching & Learning Fellow

Kim Vincent (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Mark Hoefer (APPM) Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies

Zachary Kilpatrick (APPM) Assistant Professor

Gregor Robinson (APPM) Ph.D. Student

Daniel Appelo (APPM) Associate Professor

Deidre Jaeger (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Taisa Kushner (CS/IQBio) Ph.D. Student

Jessica Gronski (APPM) Ph.D. Student

Ashton Wiens (APPM) Ph.D. Student

Steve Schmidt (EBIO) Professor

William Kleiber (APPM) Assistant Professor

Nancy C. Emery (EBIO) Assistant Professor

Marianne Reddan (PSYC) Ph.D. Student

Caitlin White (EBIO) Ph.D. Student

Sama Shrestha (APPM) Ph.D. Student

Eli Gendron (MCDB) Ph.D Student

Margaret Mitter McCormick (EBIO), Ph.D Student

Eric Vance (APPM) Associate Professor

Eve-Lyn Hinckley (ENVS) Assistant Professor

Jason Neff (ENVS) Professor

Carol Wessman (EBIO) Professor and ENVS Director

Max Boykoff (ENVS/CIRES) Associate Professor

Ted Striphas (COMM) Associate Professor & Associate Chair for Graduate Studies

William Shrum (COMM) MA Student

Lisa A. Flores (COMM) Associate Professor

Samantha West (COMM) MA Student

Zach VeShancey (COMM) MA Student

Nathan H. Bedsole (COMM) PhD Candidate

Matthew Koschmann (COMM) Associate Professor

Joanne Marras Tate (COMM) PhD Student  
Logan Rae Gomez (COMM) PhD Student, Graduate Part Time Instructor  
Ellie Busch (COMM) MA Student, Teaching Assistant  
Jamie Skerski (COMM) Senior Instructor  
Myles Mason (COMM) PhD Student, Graduate Part Time Instructor  
John M. Ackerman (PWR/COMM), Associate Professor  
Karen Tracy (COMM), Professor  
Leah Sprain (COMM) Assistant Professor  
Lydia Reinig (COMM) PhD Candidate  
Vincent Russell (COMM) PhD Student, Graduate Part-Time Instructor  
Rachel Larsen (COMM) MA Student, Teaching Assistant  
Kirsten Rowell (RIO/SILC) Research Associate  
Peter Simonson (COMM), Professor and Department Chair  
Bryan C. Taylor (COMM), Professor  
Kellie Brownlee (COMM) MA Student, Teaching Assistant  
Alan Townsend (ENVS) Professor and Director, INSTAAR  
Stacey Smith (EBIO) Associate Professor  
Tiara R. Na'puti (COMM) Assistant Professor  
Andrew T. Harris (ASEN), PhD Student, Research Assistant  
Blake Hallinan (COMM) PhD Student  
Adam Reed (ENVS) Instructor and Education Director, RASEI  
Lisa Dilling (ENVS) Associate Professor, ENVS