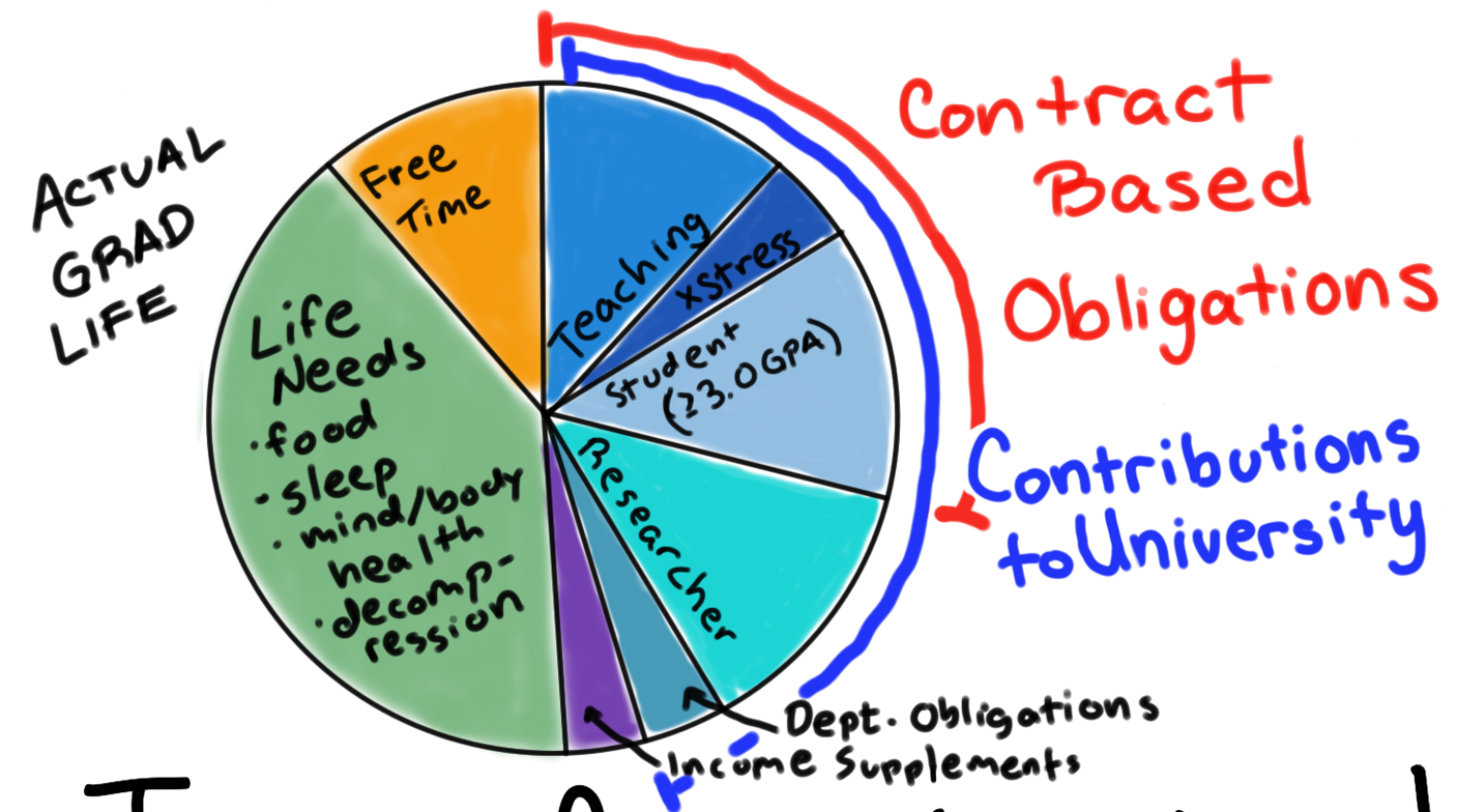
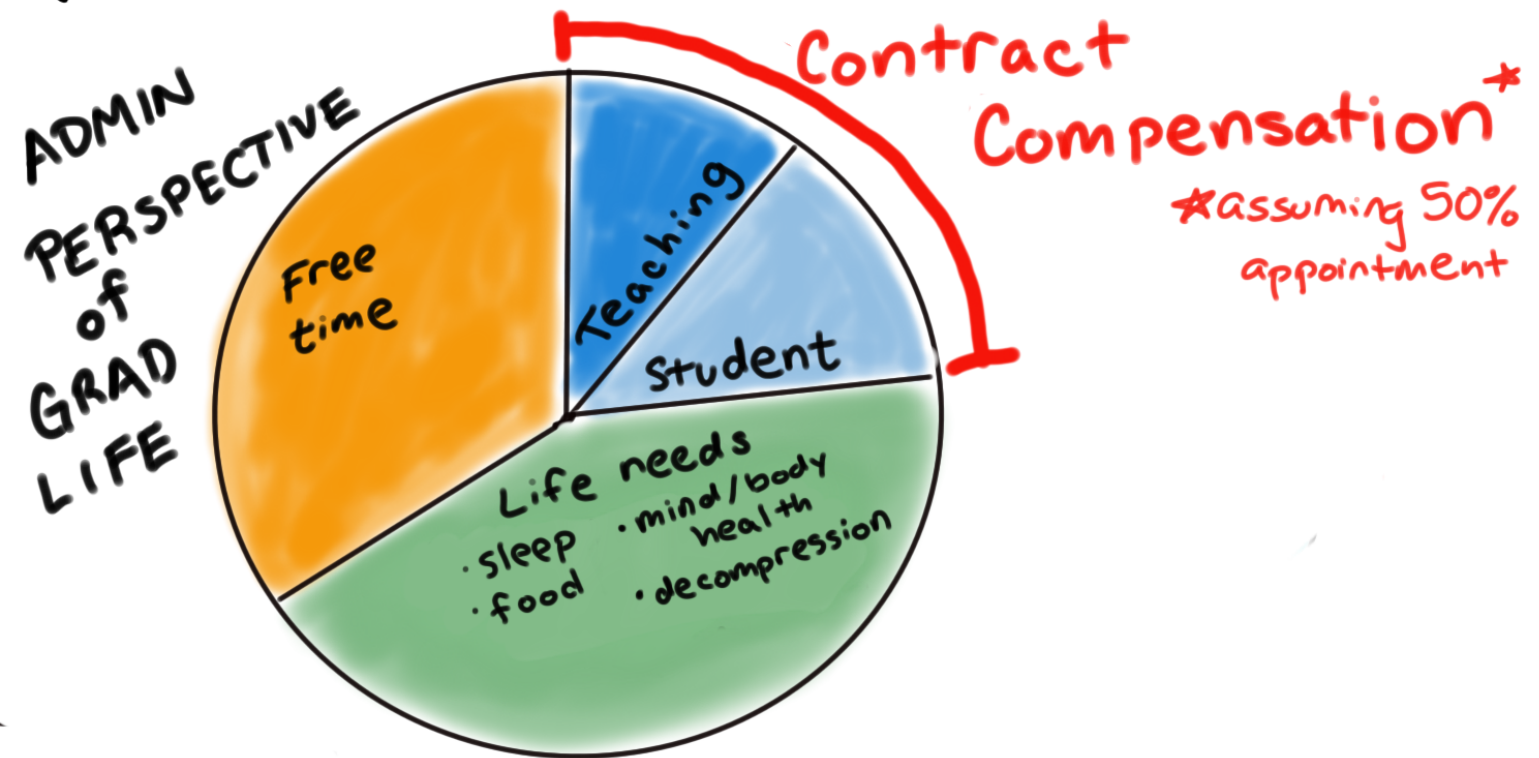


ARE GRAD STUDENTS WORKERS?



JOIN THE GRADUATE LABOR UNION!

I wasn't accepted to my PhD program on my first try. Instead, I was sent an offer, unfunded, for the MA degree program. After two years, I applied again and got an offer (my *only* offer) from CU. So now that I'm here aren't I pretty lucky? Of all the candidates the selection committee *might* have chosen, they chose *me*. And while my academic career is by no means assured, I've made my first steps. So I should be grateful, right? And since the university did me such a huge favor by accepting me from among the hundreds of other applicants, the least I can do is to put in the hours and the effort and overall give everything I can to support the important educational and scholarly mission of the university.

Well, hold on. Universities are not in the business of handing out favors. Universities are and ought to be primarily in the business of producing the best possible scholarship and the best possible educational outcomes that bring in funding for the university. This means assembling the best possible faculty, admitting the best possible undergraduates, providing the best possible facilities, and, yes, recruiting the best possible graduate students. This is all to say that, despite what your 'imposter syndrome' is telling you, you were sent an offer by that admissions committee not because you're lucky, but because you're *excellent*. And your excellence benefits the university in concrete, tangible ways.

When we run recitation or lab sections so that large lectures can involve real student interaction, we benefit the university. When

we teach courses for half of what a tenured faculty member costs, we benefit the university. When we support ongoing research, we benefit the university. And when we stop being excellent graduate students and start being excellent junior faculty, it benefits the university that their institution's name is on our CV.

Suffice it to say, you don't owe them any favors. But what do they owe you? If your work is vital to the continued functioning of the institution but you can't afford to live where it's located, who do you suppose should be grateful to whom? If your excellence is a component of the institution's good reputation, but you can't get through a day without being harassed or demeaned, who do you suppose is getting the better end of the bargain? Those of us in graduate school can never really forget the years of earning potential that we gave up in order to have our shot at academia, yet what cost is borne by the institution that was lucky enough to benefit from that decision? Only as much as we are prepared to demand.

We deserve fair compensation for our labor. We deserve an affordable place to live and healthcare for ourselves and our families. We deserve a safe and comfortable workplace and recognition for the indispensable work we do on behalf of this institution. But we can't expect any favors. If you want better conditions, join the graduate labor union and make a difference.