

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

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Draft: Final

2023 UH English Advocacy Resolution

Whereas, the newly released CLASS Strategic Plan Draft for 2023-2028 likewise cites “student success” as Priority #1 in our path to becoming a top-50 university.

Whereas, Graduate Student Teaching Fellows (GTFs) and Adjunct Lecturers (Adjuncts) across the English Department and Creative Writing Program are dedicated to the University of Houston’s mission to become an elite institution.

Whereas, the 60th administration of the Student Government Association believes all student workers at the University of Houston should be re-evaluated to account for the cost of living on campus and cost of attendance.

Whereas, the University of Houston has not provided a written proposal or commitment to wage increases for English GTFs and Adjuncts.

Whereas, many of the English Department's Adjuncts are former graduate students therefore several of our current graduate students may be subject to the following practices and livelihoods.

Whereas, the University of Houston aims to continue to attract top graduate students.

Whereas, the University of Houston's English Department has produced nationally prominent artists and critics and upholds a high standard of teaching excellence. The University of Houston's Creative Writing Program is also consistently ranked one of the top-ten Creative Writing Programs in the nation.

Whereas, the last significant pay increase for GTFs occurred in the Fall of 2013, as a result of organizing initiatives led by the English Department and University of Houston Creative Writing Program.

Whereas, better conditions for instructors result in better learning outcomes, which means higher graduation statistics and greater prestige for the university.

Whereas, an enduring lack of resources leaves GTFs and Adjuncts vulnerable until a more sustainable pay and teaching solution can be found. Whereas, the University of Houston commonly cites MIT's Living Wage Calculator in University-produced materials.

Whereas, MIT's most recent metric estimates the cost of living and teaching for a single person in the Houston metropolitan area is \$35,989 (before taxes), annually.

Whereas, other Houston-based educational systems, like that of HISD, compensate K-12 educators with no independent teaching experience with starting salaries of over \$61,500 for the 2022-2023 school year and pay increasing relative to the number of years of teaching experience.

Whereas, administrators at the University of Houston use, among other metrics, the Oklahoma State University "Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey" to set pay standards for Graduate Tuition Fellowships (GTFs).

Whereas, median pay across the sampled universities in the aforementioned report is \$23,742, meaning UH pays significantly below-average rates when compared to institutional peers, including those which serve areas outside of major metropolitan areas and thus offer lower associated costs of living.

Whereas, average wages at UH for MFA students, PhD students, and lower-division full-time equivalent Adjuncts (teaching 4 sections per semester) in the 9-month academic year are \$18,478.63, \$20,922.4, and \$24,000 before taxes, respectively.

Whereas, making less than \$20,000 a year after taxes means lower-division Adjuncts teaching a full-time equivalent course load (4 sections per semester) are required to take on additional jobs to make a living wage, which often amounts to working well beyond full-time to account for the discrepancy of at least \$11,989 between the pay and the cost of living in Houston.

Whereas, a lack of resources leaves GTFs and Adjuncts vulnerable as employees and collectively as an institution until a more sustainable pay and teaching solution can be found.

Whereas, GTFs are currently classified as “non-regular part-time employees” or “student employees,” which makes them ineligible for employment benefits.

Whereas, the Texas Legislature ruled the supplemental health insurance payments from the University were not in compliance with the law.

Whereas, effective October 1, 2021, the University of Houston announced that the health insurance payment would be incorporated into base stipends and that students would simultaneously receive a \$1,135.89 raise to account for the loss of the supplemental health insurance payments.

Whereas, GTFs were offered a supplemental stipend of \$150 a month (\$1,800 per calendar year) toward the cost of health insurance, which was dispersed separately from graduate teaching stipends.

Whereas, GTF base funding levels appeared to rise \$2,935.89 from the 2020-2021 academic year to the 2022-2023 academic year when this change to the pay structure amounts to only a nominal increase in gross student pay of \$126.21 for the 9-month academic year (\$1,135.89 per year).

Whereas, other Texas institutions of higher education, like UT-Austin, have also asked for fairer wages for their graduate students and adjuncts in the past year.

Whereas, the UT-Austin's New Writers Project, a fellow Texas program with a lower ranking than the University of Houston's Creative Writing concentration, starts their first year MFAs with a stipend of \$25,000 for 12 months and fully covers student health insurance. The Michener Center, a UT-Austin program competitive with University of Houston, starts their MFAs with a stipend of \$29,500 and no teaching course load.

Whereas, other programs competitive with the top-ranked concentration in the English department cover health insurance, and have stipends that increase with each year in the program.

Whereas, this University wants the Department of English's graduate programs to remain nationally relevant and competitive in the future in order to achieve their 50in 5 campaign.

Whereas, Adjunct faculty are designated ineligible for 100% benefit coverage, unless they achieve a 4-4 course load. By comparison, tenure-track professors typically teach a 2-2 course load and receive compensatory benefits. Adjuncts, whose contracts do not stipulate the same service or research obligations reflected in tenure-track contracts, have nonetheless frequently been asked to do uncompensated or undercompensated service work on behalf of the Department.

Whereas, GTFs and Adjuncts perform an overwhelming majority of the educational labor in the English Department. In the Fall of 2022, Adjuncts and GTFs taught 98% of 1301 classes, 98% of 1302 classes, and 90% of all 2300 level classes.

Whereas, English 1301, 1302, and 2300-level courses are part of the Texas state core curriculum, GTFs and Adjuncts are some of the first instructional figures the majority of new students engage with at the University of Houston.

Whereas, this most recent Oklahoma State University (OSU) survey results of the "Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey" revealed average compensation for a graduate instructor stood at \$19,078 for the Academic Year 21-22 for a .5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) teaching position.

Whereas, current UH MFA students in Creative Writing, who typically teach a 2-2 load as instructors of record in our English Department, do not even make this wage.

Whereas, many teaching assistants included in the OSU "Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey," do not act as instructors of record as is required of UH English GTFs.

Whereas, both MFA Creative Writing students and PhD students in Creative Writing, Literature, and Rhetoric, Composition, & Pedagogy typically act as instructors of record for two (2) 1300/2300 level classes per semester, but MFA students are not compensated equally.

Whereas, the Modern Language Association (MLA) recommends compensation of \$12,500 for part-time faculty for standard 3-credit hour courses, assuming a full-time teaching schedule is considered to be 3 courses per semester. Whereas, upper-division compensation currently stands at \$5,000 per course and the majority of Adjunct faculty are assigned to teach lower division classes, which compensates only \$3000 per course.

Whereas, UH English graduate compensation underperforms in a modest peer group, and, in the actual field of admissions, the University of Houston is even less competitive.

Whereas, the University of Houston Creative Writing Program is regularly ranked among the top-ten Creative Writing Programs in the nation yet both private and public Creative Writing institutions in this tier provide better pay-to-workload ratios on average.

Whereas, Adjuncts have no access to representation on campus and no pathway to advocate for themselves as a community, despite teaching the vast majority of core classes at UH. Adjuncts have significantly fewer rights in the University System than any other group of academic stakeholders.

Whereas, global conversations around systemic inequality make it clear that we can no longer continue to make decisions for communities who are not offered a seat at the table.

Whereas, UH's Strategic Plan envisions the University serving "as an exemplar for inclusive community engagement." Equal representation and ethical co-construction of our community will be imperative in the years to come.

Whereas, one cannot claim to be an institution grounded in principles of equity, without ensuring the support of those who sustain the University of Houston as an institution of higher learning.

Whereas, the English department hopes to avoid further misapprehension as the result of the systemic lack of representation of Adjuncts in University leadership.

Whereas, conferences give our teaching core access to new and creative pathways of thought, which in turn enrich our classrooms. Conferences also create new pathways for donors and investors who share the vision of what UH must achieve to be an institution of the future.

Whereas, the lack of resources further encourages already impoverished workers to take on additional labor to cover costs which, in turn, deprives them and their students of a higher quality of life and education.

Whereas, Adjuncts, who often mentor award-winning graduate student teachers and receive awards for their own scholarly and creative pursuits, constitute untapped potential for service and additional research recognition.

Whereas, the vast discrepancies in pay and professional development within our English department allows Associate Professors to be paid a median of \$89,000 to teach 2 classes per semester, conduct research, and provide service while full-time equivalent lower-division Adjuncts in the department teach double the amount of courses, are paid \$70,000 less with no opportunity for conference or research funding at the departmental, college, or University level, despite their often uncompensated or undercompensated service to the University.

Whereas, the data of the available documentation shows that pay for Adjuncts in the English department has remained at \$3000 per course for over thirty years; and has never increased to account for inflation or growing University prestige during this period.

Whereas, when adjusting for inflation, Adjuncts' pay in the English Department have decreased by at least 109% in purchasing power since 1993. Whereas, historical pay data and accounting for inflation reveals English GTF stipends have, in purchasing power, decreased by at least 15% since 2013. Whereas, the cost of living in Houston has only grown.

Whereas, many GTFs and Adjuncts support dependent families, further exacerbating this financial crisis.

Whereas, it is not practical to continue to have these conversations around compensation every decade for graduate students and every thirty years for adjuncts.

Whereas, the current UH English GTF stipends, if not increased significantly, will begin to have a steep impact on recruitment, and risk the UHCWP national standing.

Whereas, raising the stipends of GTFs and the pay per course for Adjuncts helps make the University of Houston synonymous with excellence at every level.

Therefore, be it resolved by the 60th Student Government Association of the University of Houston: That the Student Government Association stands with University of Houston English Advocacy, Graduate Student Fellows, and Adjuncts within the English Department in their fight for a written commitment/proposal for livable wages, health benefits, fair workloads, representation, research funding, and further protections as students and Alumni of this institution and instructors of record who have dedicated themselves to student mentorship; so long as that the funding of one faction of the university does not result in a net loss of funding from other campus initiatives.

Be it further resolved, that the University of Houston grant a base salary for GTFs (and graduate students who receive equivalent fellowships for alternate positions) at a minimum of \$35,000 per year, and that the base pay be raised to \$9,000 per course section for Adjuncts.

Be it further resolved, that the University of Houston recognize English Graduate Student Employees be classified as “benefits-eligible employees” and that 100% benefit-coverage be available for all Adjuncts teaching at least 3 classes (9 credits) per semester.

Be it further resolved, that UH English GTFs see a reduction of per-semester teaching assignments from a 2-2 to a 1-1 course load.

Be it further resolved, that University leadership will support Adjunct representation on the Faculty Senate.

Be it further resolved, that the SGA encourages significant contingent faculty awards for conference travel and research funds be established at

the University, College, and department level to support the professional development of UH Adjuncts.

Be it further resolved, that the SGA encourages an annual raise tethered to average inflation, CPI, and cost of living data from the previous year(s) be automatically allotted to the contracts of both Graduate Student Fellows and Adjuncts, to insulate our largest teaching base at UH from the ongoing, pernicious widening of future gaps in these categories.

Benjamin Rizk

APPROVED

Benjamin Rizk

Student Government President

Date of President's Approval: May 3rd 2023

Sophia Wilson

Sophia Wilson

Speaker of the Senate

Date of Senate Approval: May 3rd 2023