

Statement from the GEO-UIC Taskforce on 9-Month Appointments

To Acting Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Colley,

We were tasked with examining the disadvantages of semester-by-semester appointments and drafting recommendations to address them. We have done that where possible. However, in this statement we also wanted to provide the context from our discussions and comment on what we did not feel we could address.

Guaranteed funding is not generally available for all graduate workers. In departments without guaranteed funding, semester-by-semester appointments create real financial insecurity; graduate workers know they will have bills and expenses due in six months, but not necessarily a job. This is especially true of international students, who have additional constraints on their employment. Additionally, through our conversations we discovered that some departments start their appointments later and end them earlier than other departments, which has the cumulative effect of shaving off a month of pay over the academic year. We make a direct link between success as a graduate student and financial stability; financial issues can delay or even derail their scholarly progress. For example, semester-to-semester appointments and insecure funding may result in graduate student workers seeking employment outside of the university (where visa restrictions allow).

However, even in departments with guaranteed funding, shorter term appointments contribute to financial stress and create a sense of institutional disinvestment; some graduate workers fear some greater meaning behind not being given a 9-month appointment in the Fall. This is a real negative impact of short-term appointments. The perceived and real insecurities are at the heart of what we were and were not able to address as a task force through our recommendations. We cannot address the real financial insecurity inherent with lack of guaranteed financial support for graduate student workers, but we feel our recommendations do address graduate student workers' perceived sense of insecurity.

We believe that increased transparency will alleviate these anxieties. Our recommendations strive to create transparency around fees, funding, and expenses. We were inspired by the website that University of Wisconsin-Madison has established with dashboards to present acceptance rates, anticipated expenses, funding sources by year, and time to degree. We believe making such data more accessible to current students will give them a realistic financial outlook, while also being a useful tool for conveying information to prospective graduate students.

Semester-by-semester appointments can also be suboptimal for the University. Having to process two appointments that could have been one appointment creates gratuitous work for Human Resources that falls during winter break when Human Resource's capacity is decreased. This time-sensitive workload has led to pay disruptions – disruptions particularly hard to weather for financially vulnerable graduate workers. As the type of employee most frequently hired from semester to semester, graduate workers are disproportionately likely to experience these pay disruptions in Spring. Wider adoption of nine-month appointments could increase the efficiency of Human Resources, thus mitigating the likelihood of pay disruptions.

However, we also recognize that universal 9-month appointments create gratuitous work for Human Resources when graduate workers change job classifications between semesters. Departments need flexibility to address their unique conditions: they may have consistent and large differences in enrollment in the Fall and Spring, they may fund their graduate workers through a patchwork of various funding sources that necessitate varying appointment types, etc. In all our recommendations, we have endeavored to respect department autonomy.

Our recommendations attempt to encourage departments to find the right balance between 9-month and semester-by-semester appointments for them and their graduate students. We are confident that the balance will entail an expansion of the availability of 9-month appointments.

Sincerely,

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Recommendations of the GEO-UIC Taskforce on 9-Month Appointments

We unanimously recommend that:

1. Departments endeavor to ensure that at least 30% of individual graduate students who will be employed in both Fall and Spring within the department receive 9-month appointments, while allowing for possible enrollment fluctuations between academic years.
2. Departments develop transparent guidelines for distribution of 9-month appointments.
3. The provost institute uniform appointment dates for semester-long graduate assistantships across all units of 8/16 to 12/31 and 1/1 to 5/15.
4. The University create a digital tool, available to current and prospective students, displaying the following data for each degree program:
 - a. Percentage of students receiving TA, GA, or RA appointments
 - b. Percentage of students receiving tuition and fee waivers (TFW)
 - c. Average monthly stipend, average % appointment, and average months of funding per year
 - d. Assistants' fee assessment before and after TFW
 - e. Average time to degree

This digital tool should include data from the preceding year as well as an average over the preceding 5 years.

5. The Office of the Registrar adds "Apply Tuition and Fee Waiver" and "Degree Program" selectable options and a field displaying the corresponding calculated summary of tuition and fees to the [registrar's tuition and fees webpage](#).
6. Departments add links to the digital tools (e.g. the dashboard and the tuition and fee calculator) to the offer letters for prospective students.