

Improving the Graduate Student Experience at UConn through GEU-UAW Local 6950

Issue	Before Collective Bargaining	After Collective Bargaining
Stipends	Wage increases were unpredictable, determined unilaterally by UConn, and often contingent on fluctuations in the state budget. Average increase 1.4% per year between 2006-7 and 2013-14.	<u>Up to \$2200 more per year over the life of the contract.</u> 4% raise during bargaining for 2014-15. Contractually-guaranteed stipend increases of at least 3% per year, regardless of state budget fluctuations, during contract.
Fee/Tuition Waivers	Graduate Assistants received waiver of tuition but had to pay more than \$2200 per year in additional mandatory fees.	<u>Nearly \$900 in new fee waivers (equal to additional 3.2%-7.6% pay increase).</u> In addition to continued waiver of tuition, GAs will receive a waiver of nearly \$900 of other fees each year by end of the contract.
Health Insurance Coverage	Unilateral removal from state employee health plan in 2003, then subsequent erosion, including major cuts in 2013, all of which led to significant out-of-pocket cost increases for GAs.	<u>Restoration of state employee health benefit levels:</u> dramatically-improved coverage means significantly reduced out-of-pocket costs (e.g. elimination of 10% co-insurance and reduction of prescription costs by as much as 1000%).
Health Insurance Premiums	UConn determined premium rates unilaterally for GAs and their families, with significant increases over time.	<u>GAs pay less for better benefits.</u> The annual premium will remain flat for three years at \$200 for GA, \$1440 for GA +1, and \$1822 for GA + family. [because the initial union organizing led to a freeze on GA premium costs, these reflect 2013-14 rates for far inferior coverage] In 2015-16, this represents a 95%, 82% and 84% subsidy by UConn, respectively. As the cost of coverage goes up each year, GAs will pay an even smaller percentage.
Parking and Transit	Increased parking costs each year and elimination of transit lines with no input.	<u>50% reduction in cost for GA parking pass.</u> Union seat on University Parking and Transit Committee.
Childcare Subsidies	No childcare subsidies for GAs.	<u>Establishment of GA childcare subsidy fund.</u> Fund will grow from \$40,000 to \$80,000 per year by the end of the contract.
Paid Family Leave	No guarantee of paid family leave.	<u>Contractually-guaranteed paid family leave.</u> Six weeks paid maternity leave (eight weeks if Caesarian) and three weeks of parental leave for non-birth or adoptive parents.
Sick Leave	No guaranteed sick leave; TAs often had to find someone to cover their classes when sick.	<u>Contractually-guaranteed sick leave.</u> GA may take up to three days sick leave per semester without stipend reduction.

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Holidays and Time Off	Time off on holidays or for vacation at the discretion of the department or PI, with requests often denied or ignored.	If required to work on a holiday, GA must get another day off. GAs may request additional time off (e.g. for vacation), which cannot be unreasonably denied.
Dispute Resolution and Non-Discrimination	No neutral, fair dispute resolution process. The only neutral recourse for discrimination or harassment claims was through costly and time-consuming state and federal agencies.	All workplace disputes (including discrimination/harassment) are resolvable by a fair and expedient grievance procedure and, ultimately, <u>appeal to a neutral arbitrator</u> . State and federal agencies can also be utilized for discrimination/harassment claims.
Appointment Security	GA appointments could be withdrawn after being offered.	<u>Contractually-guaranteed appointment security</u> . Once a GA accepts an appointment, the University must honor it at the level of pay and benefits offered.
Paid Training	UConn decided whether required training was part of paid work time.	UConn must consider required training for GA positions as part of paid work time.
Workload Protections	No guaranteed recourse for excess workload	<u>Contractual access to workload relief or extra pay</u> . If a GA is required to work more than 20 hours per week on average, they can utilize an expedited grievance process to resolve problem.
Discipline and Dismissal	Graduate assistants could be disciplined or dismissed arbitrarily or “at will” at any time.	<u>UConn must prove “just cause”</u> in order to discipline or dismiss graduate assistants.
Employment Files	No guaranteed access or right to respond to content in an individual’s employment file	<u>GAs have the right to inspect and respond to content</u> in their employment file
Health and Safety	UConn unilaterally set and enforced health and safety standards. Some GAs did not receive the proper training or equipment when requested.	<u>GAs have contractual rights to a safe and healthy work environment</u> , including the right to health and safety training and to proper safety equipment. UConn policies are now subject to grievance and arbitration procedure.
Workspace and Materials	Provision of workspace and materials necessary to carry out job duties was up to the university	<u>UConn must provide space and materials</u> necessary for GA assignment.
International Student Rights	No unified GA voice in state or national policy making	Through the Union, GAs have organized visa seminars, helped make the particular concerns of international student workers a priority in efforts to secure comprehensive immigration reform, and have advocated on efforts to expand Optional Practical Training (OPT).
Protecting Federal Funding for Science Research	No unified ASE voice in state or national policy making	Through the Union, GAs have advocated effectively for federal research funding in conjunction with GAs and postdoctoral researchers at other universities.