



Student Government

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

University of Colorado Student Government Legislative Council

Date: 04/21/2016 84 LCR 05 — Transparency in Graduate Student Training

Sponsored by:

John Lurquin	Tri-Executive
Joseph Soto	Tri-Executive
Boneth Ahaneku	Tri-Executive
Richard Bateman	UGGS President
Elizabeth Libero	UGGS VP of Finance
Laura Michaelson	CUSG Liaison to Graduate/Professional Students
Ilsa Hale	CUSG Director of Greek Affairs

Authored by: John Lurquin Tri-Executive

A Resolution to Promote Transparency in Graduate Student Training

Resolution History

The goal of this resolution is to bring attention to the lack of transparency in certain aspects of the recruitment and training of graduate students at CU-Boulder, particularly among PhD students. The transparency issues discussed in this resolution generally fall into two categories: transparency in academics/training and transparency in funding/costs. Data discussed in this resolution were collected in the 2014 Graduate Student Social Climate Survey, from graduate program websites, and from the Office of Planning, Budget, and Analysis. With the recently published results of the 2014 Social Climate Survey and the strong relationship that currently exists among graduate student leaders and key administrators, now is the time to develop and implement campus-wide standards that promote transparency in the recruitment and training of graduate students.

2014 Graduate Student Social Climate Survey

In the fall of 2014, CU-Boulder administered two campus social climate surveys, one of which was specific to graduate students. The design of the survey was a collaboration among the Office of Planning, Budget, and Analysis, the Graduate School, and the United Government of Graduate Students (UGGS). 4,237 graduate students (2,561 doctoral and 1,767 masters

level) were invited to participate, and 38% completed the survey. Data were analyzed in the spring and summer of 2015, and they were published in the spring of 2016.¹

A. Graduate Student Funding/Costs

1. Funding. The majority of graduate student funding is awarded through academic departments in the form of graduate assistantships (e.g., teaching assistantship) that provide a monthly stipend, tuition waiver, and partial health insurance coverage.² However, very few standards exist that guide how programs allocate this funding and how programs communicate details of that funding to the graduate student (e.g., whether funding is guaranteed or not). According to the 2014 Social Climate Survey, 14% of PhD respondents reported they did not receive accurate information about the availability of funding for the regular semesters, and 33% reported they did not receive accurate information about funding for the summer semesters. This is likely due to a lack of information and to information that is misleading. For example, the School of Education's website states that "The School of Education offers generous funding packages for doctoral programs;" however, among the survey respondents pursuing a PhD in the School of Education, 14% reported they did not receive accurate information about funding for fall/spring semesters, and 60% reported they did not receive accurate information about funding for summer semesters.

2. Costs. A first-year graduate student during the fall 2015 semester who was enrolled in seven or more credit hours paid \$956.89 in student fees. According to the 2014 Social Climate Survey, many PhD students (50%) reported they did not receive accurate information prior to attending CU-Boulder about what they would pay in student fees.

B. Graduate Student Academics/Training

1. Graduation rate and time to degree. About 30-40% of PhD students leave CU-Boulder without a degree, and of the 60-70% that do graduate, the median time to degree among the programs ranges from 4.0 years to 8.3 years.^{3,4} Despite this variability, almost all PhD degrees at CU-Boulder are advertised as requiring 5 or 6 years to complete. The following are a few examples:

- According to the Chemistry PhD program's website, "...most students graduate with their PhD in about 5 years."⁵ However, the 5-year graduation rate for this program is only 19%.
- The website for the Environmental Studies PhD program states that "PhD degree students have 6 years to complete all degree requirements," otherwise the student "may be dismissed from their program."⁶ The 6-year graduation rate in this program is 46%.
- The History Department expects all PhD students "to complete all degree requirements within six years from the date of the start of course work in the doctoral program."⁷ The current 6-year graduation rate is only 13%. The website does also state that "students who fail to complete the degree in this six-year period may

¹ <http://www.colorado.edu/studentsuccess/campus-climate/graduate-student-social-climate-survey>

² <http://www.colorado.edu/GraduateSchool/funding/department.html>

³ http://www.colorado.edu/pba/degrees/ttd/gr_intro.htm

⁴ <http://www.colorado.edu/pba/depts/arp/dashboard.htm>

⁵ <http://www.colorado.edu/chembio/prospective-graduate/phd-program-chemistry>

⁶ <http://www.colorado.edu/envs/graduate-students/ms-phd-programs/phd>

⁷ <http://www.colorado.edu/history/graduate-students/policies>

submit a petition...requesting a maximum of a one-year extension to complete all degree requirements." However, the 7-year graduation rate is still only 26%.

- The Physics PhD program requirements state that "to obtain a Ph.D. in Physics a graduate student must complete all requirements within a time limit of six years."⁸ The 6-year graduation rate is 35%.

Little is understood about why some graduate students leave their programs, whether it is the result of students failing curriculum requirements or whether they leave voluntarily, or what accounts for the wide variability among graduate programs. Most importantly, a large number of graduate programs mislead their graduate students in these respects. They often advertise the PhD as requiring 5-6 years to complete, though graduating in this time seems to be quite rare for many of them. This makes long-term planning difficult for graduate students, and it indicates a lack of necessary evaluation and oversight of graduate programs.

2. Grad student advising. Upon entering a graduate program, graduate students are often assigned to a single faculty advisor to oversee their academic progress, and the relevance of this faculty member is typically mentioned in the program's curriculum requirements.^{5,6,7,9} For example, it is often the case that the graduate student's advisor reviews drafts of a thesis that is required in the curriculum, and the graduate student is unable to proceed through the program until their advisor approves. This faculty member holds authority over the graduate student's progress. However, despite the significance of this relationship, very few standards exist and very little guidance is provided by the university for how faculty members should advise graduate students. This might explain why, according to the 2014 Social Climate Survey, 36% of PhD students do not have weekly meetings with their advisors, and 44% do not receive academic evaluations at least once a year.

CU-Boulder has established standards regarding the education of undergraduate students in the classroom, and these are outlined in the Professional Rights and Duties of Faculty Members.¹⁰ For example, according to this document, faculty members are expected to hold office hours, meet classes as scheduled, comply with academic unit policies concerning absences, participate in the evaluation of teaching, and evaluate students. No such explicit standards exist regarding the training of graduate students or regarding the relationship between the faculty advisor and graduate student.

Resolution Summary

The 2014 Graduate Student Social Climate Survey was a move in the right direction, and several of the findings of the survey concern the transparency and accuracy of information that prospective and current graduate students receive from their graduate programs and from the university. This resolution urges the administration to standardize certain practices (outlined below) that are likely to improve the dissemination of information and improve graduate student training.

⁸ <http://phys.colorado.edu/graduate-students/physics-program-requirements-0>

⁹ <http://www.colorado.edu/education/graduate-programs/curriculum-instruction-ci/phd-literacy-studies/degree-requirements>

¹⁰ http://www.colorado.edu/bfa/sites/default/files/attached-files/PRDJanuary16_2013.pdf

Whereas, “advancing our reputation” is one of the three key priorities identified by the CU-Boulder Chancellor;¹¹

Whereas, the 5,300 graduate students at CU-Boulder¹² contribute to a significant portion of the courses taught and the research conducted at CU-Boulder, two core components of CU-Boulder’s reputation;

Whereas, CU-Boulder administered a 2014 Graduate Student Campus Social Climate Survey with findings that indicated transparency issues regarding graduate student funding/costs and academics/training;

Whereas, the majority of PhD degrees at CU-Boulder are advertised as requiring 5 or 6 years to complete, which significantly contradicts actual graduation rates and time to degree;

Whereas, few campus-wide standards exist that address the recruitment and training of graduate students, including graduate student advising.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Legislative Council of the University of Colorado Boulder Student Government, THAT:

Section 1: CUSG supports efforts to develop and implement campus-wide standards on providing transparent and accurate information to graduate students about the graduate degree in which they plan to pursue or are currently pursuing.

- A. This information, at the least, should be published on the graduate program’s website in an obvious and transparent manner:
 - 1. Availability of funding, the likelihood of obtaining funding, and whether funding is guaranteed. Stipends should be reported as a percentage of the cost of living in Boulder, CO.
 - 2. Costs associated with the degree, including, but not limited to, tuition, fees, and health care premiums.
 - 3. Actual graduation rate and time to degree for the graduate program and for any faculty member assigned to be a graduate student advisor.
 - 4. Department grievance reporting policy and procedure.
- B. A Graduate Student Climate Task Force was created in 2015 and was comprised of graduate students from UGGS and across campus, faculty, and members of the Ombuds office, Housing and Dining Services, and the Graduate School. In response to transparency issues highlighted in the Social Climate Survey, the task force created an offer/admission letter template for all graduate programs so that incoming graduate students receive the accurate and clear information about their academic

¹¹ <http://www.colorado.edu/chancellor/campus-priorities>

¹² <http://www.colorado.edu/pba/div/enrl/>

support. Graduate programs should use this offer/admission letter when recruiting graduate students. (See Appendix)

Section 2: CUSG supports efforts to develop and implement campus-wide standards on the training of graduate students, transparent communication of the training, and the evaluation of the training. These standards should be clearly communicated to prospective and current graduate students and should include:

- A. Weekly meetings with a faculty advisor.
- B. Annual evaluations of graduate student academic progress.
- C. Evaluation of the quality of faculty advising.

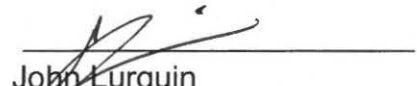
Section 3: CUSG calls upon the CU-Boulder administration to form a working group to develop campus-wide policies that address the issues outlined in this resolution that would be required of all graduate programs. The working group should also recommend what campus infrastructure would be necessary to continuously evaluate whether graduate programs adhere to the policies.

Section 4: The resolution shall take effect upon final passage in Legislative Council and upon either obtaining the signature of two Tri-Executives and the Legislative Council President or the lapse of six days without action by the Tri-Executives.


	Vote Count:	
4/21/16	1 st reading	Acclamation
4/28/16	2 nd reading	Approved



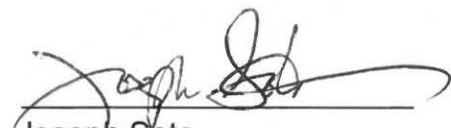
Nicolas Trevino
Legislative Council President



John Lurquin
President of Student Affairs



Boneth Ahaneku
President of Internal Affairs



Joseph Soto
President of External Affairs

Appendix:
Graduate Program Offer/Admission Letter Template

Dear <name>,

I am pleased to inform you that your application for admission to the <DEGREE> in <PROGRAM NAME> at the University of Colorado **Boulder** for <TERM AND YEAR> has been favorably reviewed. We have recommended to the Graduate School that you be admitted as a graduate student in good standing.

Academics

Your advisor will be <ADVISOR NAME>, <ADVISOR'S EMAIL ADDRESS>. (Insert any additional information about the advisor matching process, if applicable). The academic program is generally organized across <X> years, and details about the curriculum, requirements and structure of the program can be found here <LINK TO PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS ON DEPARTMENT WEBSITE>. Please feel free to consult with <ADVISOR NAME>, any other faculty member, or the graduate program assistant, <GPA'S NAME> concerning matters related to your graduate studies here.

Funding

The Department will provide support for each of your first <NUMBER> academic years, as long as you are making satisfactory academic progress toward completion of your degree and remain full-time enrolled. This support may take the form of a teaching assistantship, research assistantship or fellowship, depending on the needs of the department. Support beyond the first <NUMBER> years may be available, but is not guaranteed. Summer support is available in the form of <EXPLAIN>. In the unlikely event of a shortfall of funding within the University, this intent to provide support is not, however, legally binding.

For the first academic year, your support will take the form of a <PERCENTAGE AND TYPE> position, which is approximately (X) hours per week. This position comes with an academic year salary of approximately \$(XXXXX). Compensation for your appointment includes a maximum of <X> hours of tuition coverage for each semester. *(Include if not 45% or above) Please note that credit hours taken over that amount will not be covered.* If you choose to enroll in the [CU Student Gold Health Insurance](#), approximately 80-90% of the plan's cost will be covered as part of your appointment compensation.

Additional information regarding student faculty appointments terms and conditions may be found on the [Graduate Student Appointment Information page](#) or you may consult with <GPA NAME> on any questions you may have about this offer of support.

Costs

For academic year <CURRENT AY>, out-of-pocket costs for first-year graduate students included approximately <\$CURRENT AY AMOUNT> toward health insurance and approximately <\$CURRENT AY AMOUNT> toward student fees. These fees provide you access to a variety of amenities on

campus, including a regional bus pass, unlimited use of the Recreation Center, resources through the Career Services Office, and much more. The bill due date for incoming graduate students on appointment is the *second* due date of the semester, which is after you receive your first paycheck. A tuition and fees estimator, as well a list of all due dates can be found on the [Bursar's Office website](#).

Acceptance of Offer of Admission

An official notification of admission will be sent to you via email from the Office of Admissions with information on how to confirm your intent to enroll in the [MYCUBOULDER portal](#). Your admission is not finalized until you have confirmed and paid the confirmation deposit. If you do not receive the official admit email shortly, please contact me **<OR OTHER PROGRAM CONTACT.>**

Insert for International Students

If you require an immigration document, such as a Form I-20, the document will be issued by International Admissions. It can take up to six weeks to receive the letter and documents if your letter is being mailed to an address outside of the U.S.

Because of our policy of limited admission, we would appreciate a response from you, either by confirming in the [MYCUBOULDER portal](#) or contacting us directly via email to **<GPA'S OR ADVISOR'S NAME>** at **<EMAIL ADDRESS>** as soon as possible. You are, however, under no obligation to respond to this offer of financial support prior to April 15, by agreement of the member institutions of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). You may view the full agreement at the [CGS site](#).

If you accept our offer of admission, you will receive more information about fall orientation meetings and workshops, registration, housing in the Boulder area, etc. If you have any questions, please call **<GPA'S NAME>** at **<(303) XXX-XXXX>** or e-mail: **<GPA'S E-MAIL ADDRESS>**.

We very much hope you will accept our offer of admission to the University of Colorado Boulder and look forward to your joining our department next fall!

Best regards,

