

# The Case for Graduate Collective Bargaining

2022-10-24

# Why do we need collective bargaining?

1. Graduate assistants lack institutional power. Administrators do not engage with graduate workers in good faith and systematically minimize our concerns.
2. GA stipends at UMD do not meet the cost of living and are the lowest among peer institutions
3. Collective bargaining can help institute worker protections and foster greater diversity and equity. As a result, a union is also an important recruitment tool.

UMD administration does not  
argue in good faith

# Administration unilaterally testifies against CB

## Administration

“ Collective Bargaining would damage the mentor-mentee relationship.

*-Provost Rice (and others) in 2022 collective bargaining hearings*

”

## Our Response

Faculty should have a voice in the University of Maryland's public stance on collective bargaining, and administration should not presume to speak on their behalf.

And, at other unionized institutions, such a prediction has not been borne out

# Admin dismisses need for living wage

## Administration

“ The minimum stipend for graduate students is above the cost of attendance, including living expenses. ”

-Dean Fetter, in a Diamondback article  
2021-09-21

## Our Response

The minimum stipend is over \$5,000 less than the cost-of-attendance for the full year, after taxes and health insurance.

In addition, UMD's estimated living costs for graduates are *less* than those from the Universities of WI, IN, MI, and MN. Meanwhile, independent estimates—and common sense—cite College Park, MD as far expensive than Bloomington, IN.

One estimate, the MIT living wage, is **over \$14,000 more** than the minimum stipend for the full year (\$8,000 for the academic year)

# Admin cherry-picks data to suit its narrative

## Administration

“ The Graduate School ... commissioned a ... **statistically valid study** [of GA time use] ”

*-email to Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC), Dec 2021, prior to outcome of study results*

“ 20 percent of GAs who participated in the study worked more than 20 hours per week ... **again, that estimate is subject to selection bias** ”

*-email to GAAC and GSG in Feb 2021, after outcome of study*

## Our Response

Admin cannot have it both ways.

Time-use study showed that **at least one-in-five GAs exceed 20-hour weeks**, even after adjusting for time spent toward dissertation research.

Selection bias also may lead to **underestimate** of reported time.

# Admin unconcerned with truth of its arguments

## Administration

- RAs cannot join a union
- UMD GAs do not pay medicare and social security taxes, and this would change if GAs were unionized

*-Paraphrased testimony from 2021 and 2022 bill hearings*

## Our Response

Neither point is true.

Non-exhaustive list of public unionized schools that include RAs

- Rutgers University
- University of Massachusetts

Non-exhaustive list of unionized schools exempt from FICA:

- University of Florida
- University of Michigan
- Temple University
- University of California
- Oregon State University
- Michigan State University
- University of Illinois System
- Southern Illinois University
- Montana State University
- University of Washington
- University of Oregon
- University of Iowa
- University of Wisconsin
- Rutgers University and California State University

# Admin does not engage in good-faith

## Administration

“ GAs also receive tuition remission... total compensation exceeds \$60,000 for a half-time, 9.5-month appointment ”

*-Administrative Testimony in 2021 bill hearing*

## Our Response

Tuition remission doesn't pay for food or rent.

Given that the first two years of a PhD are coursework (at most), the majority of PhDs are not enrolled in classes.



# Admin unconcerned with truth of its arguments

## Administration

“Using the shuttle instead of a car would lower the COA by more than \$3,000. [...]

The MIT cost of living includes many elements that do not apply to GAs. These include [...] a single-occupancy residence, [...] tickets to athletic events and performances, [...] and expenses that are not necessary to pursue a degree (pets, toys and games, [...])”

*-Administrator email to GAAC*

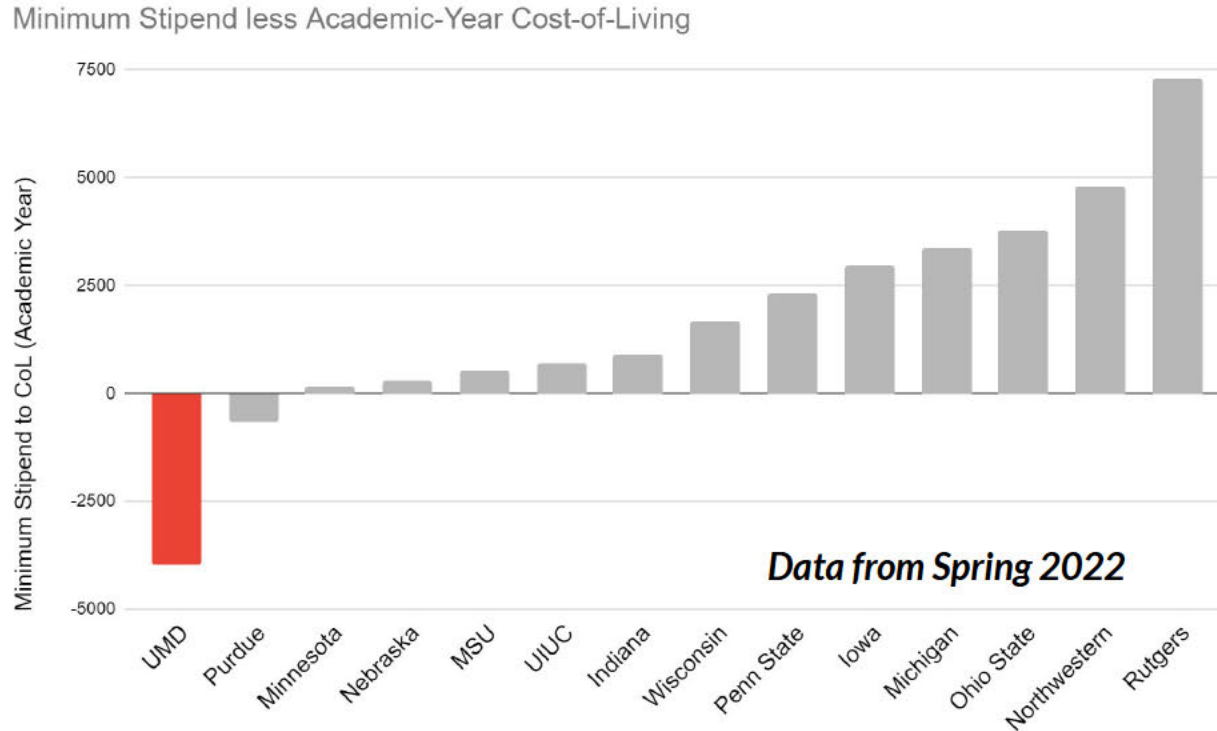
## Our Response

Graduate workers, like all workers, are not machines.

Statements like these betray a lack of compassion and an ignorance of our circumstances: for example, the UMD shuttle neither runs in the summer nor services the distant places we can afford to live

UMD stipends are insufficient  
and uncompetitive

# UMD has worst cost-of-living deficit in Big Ten



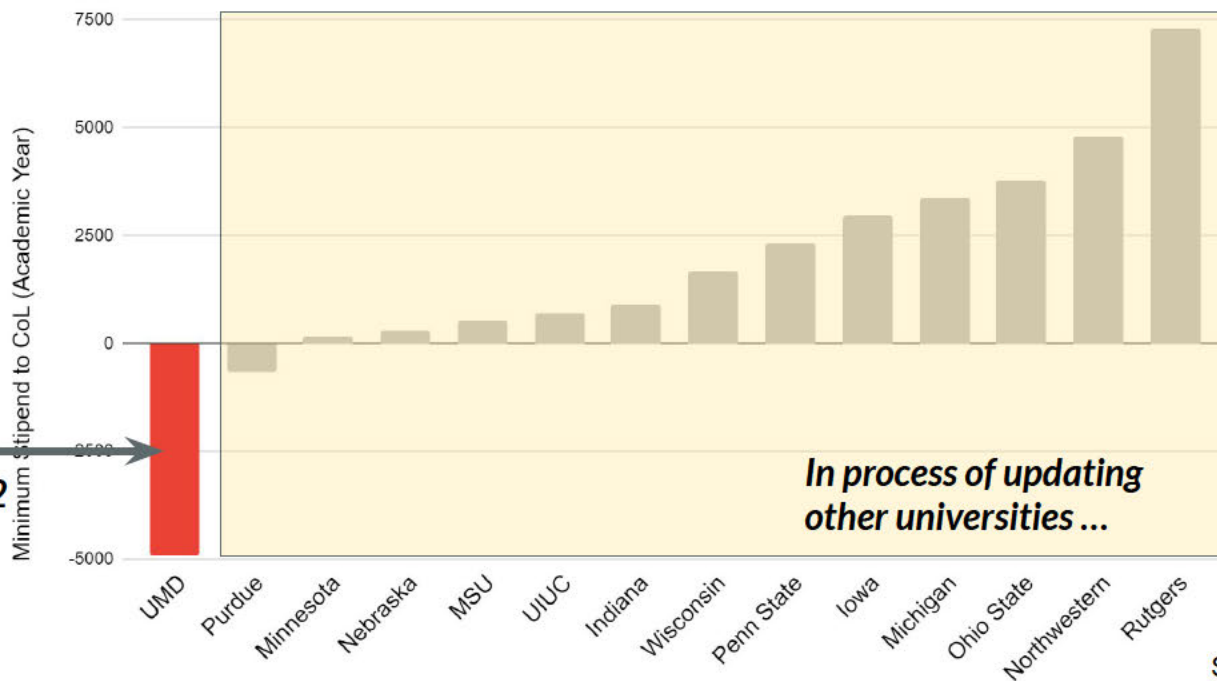
Source:

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

University websites

# UMD has worst cost-of-living deficit in Big Ten

Minimum Stipend less Academic-Year Cost-of-Living



After November COLA and Fall 2022 MIT living wage

In process of updating other universities ...

Source:

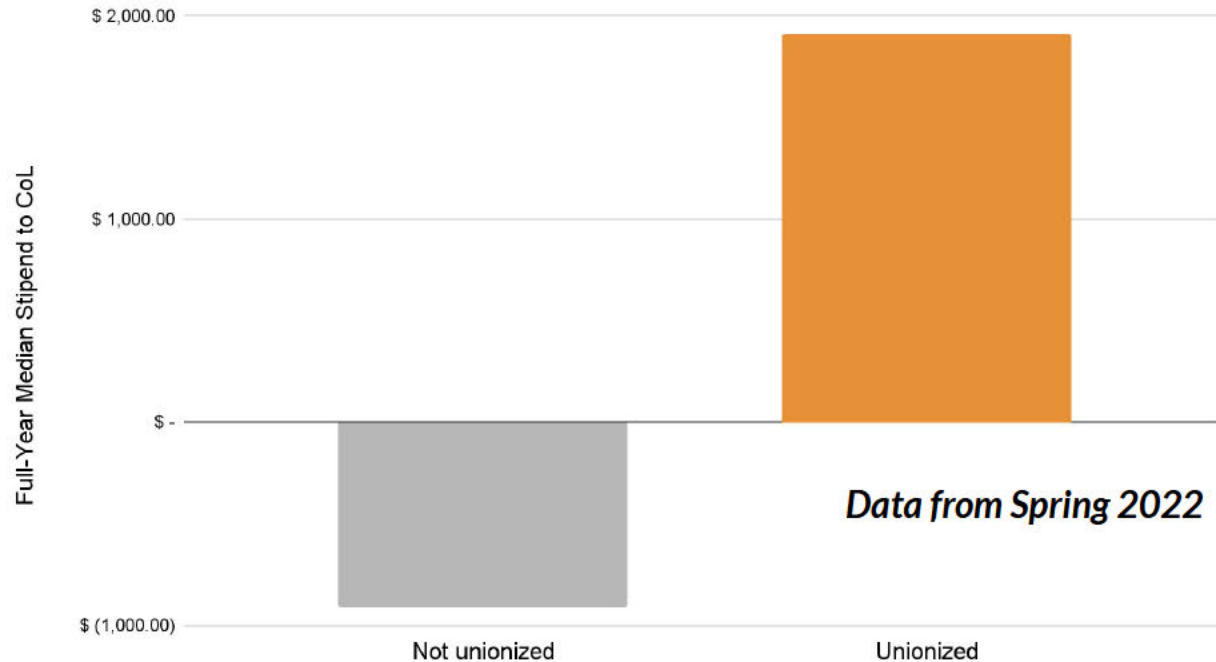
<http://phdstipends.com>

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

University websites

# Unionized GAs in the Big Ten have Higher Stipends

Cost-of-Living Deficit by Unionization across Big Ten Universities

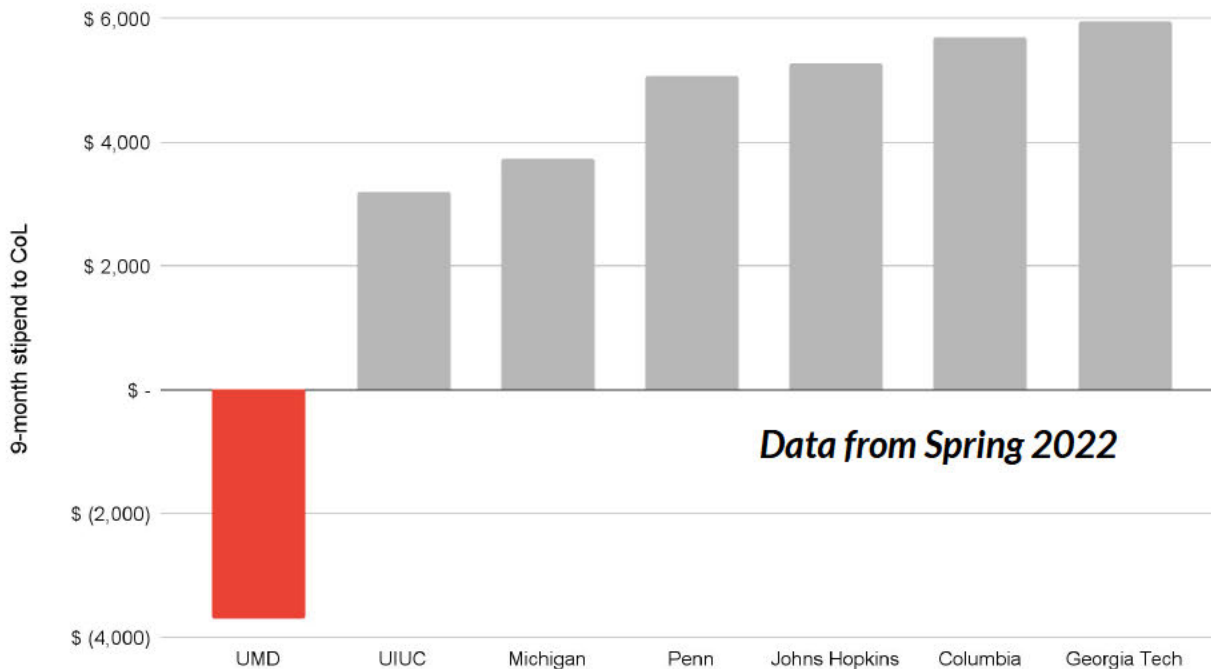


Source:

<http://phdstipends.com>  
<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>  
University websites

# Comp Sci, one of the most highly-ranked and highly-paid programs, still dead last among peers

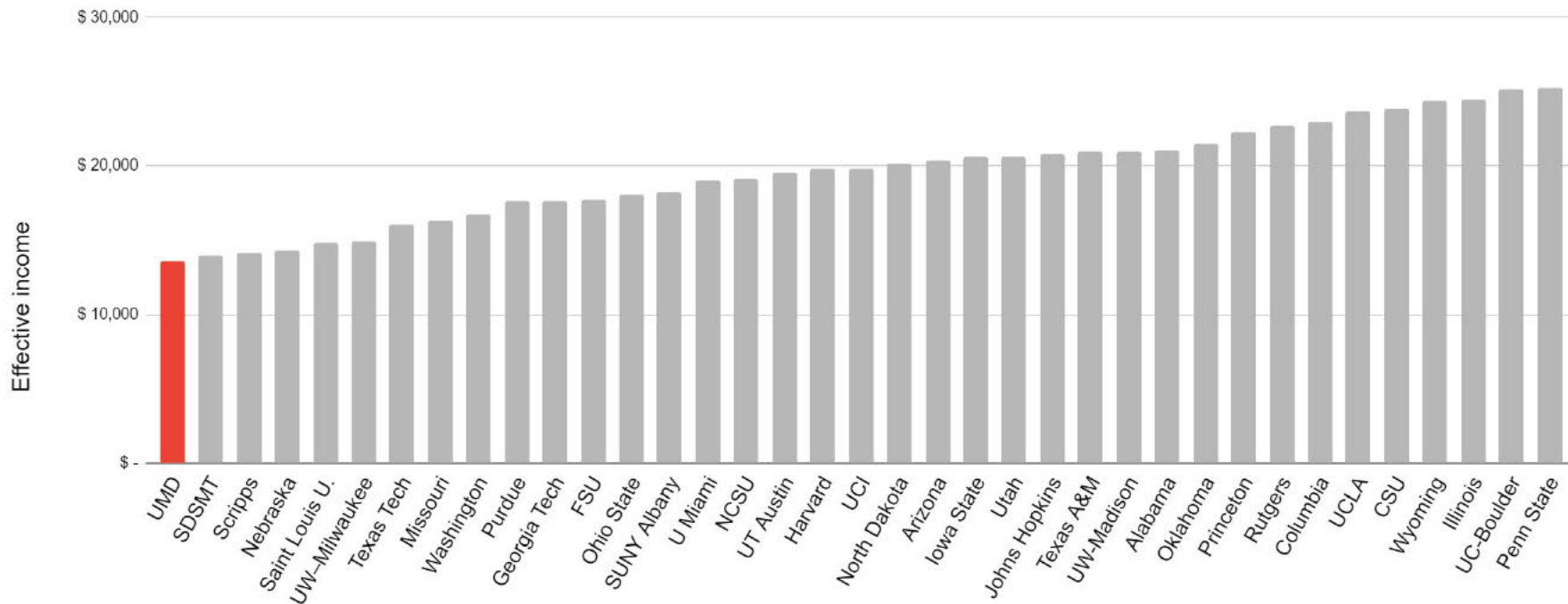
Computer Science 9-month Stipend to Cost-of-Living



Source:  
<https://ivingwage.mit.edu/>  
University websites

# A peer-reviewed study shows UMD Atmospheric Science has *lowest* effective income of 37 schools

Effective Income of Atmospheric Science PhDs



Card, Dy an R., Heather S. Sussman, and Ajay Raghavendra. "The Financial Difficulties of Students Pursuing an Atmospheric Science Graduate Degree in the United States". *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 101.9 (2020): E1524-E1536.

# English PhD Stipends are 74th of 77 Programs

**\$22,834**

University of Maryland stipend,  
adjusted to Boston-area dollars

**\$43,867**

Highest public university stipend,  
adjusted to Boston-area dollars  
(University of Michigan, 8th overall)



Lack of Collective Bargaining  
Has Real Impact

“There is severe communication issues about responsibilities that are to protect the university and abuse GAs.”

– *Anonymous*

“I don't consider myself as a TA but as an instructor in the French department. **We can see huge disparities in the TA tasks among departments/schools but the salary is the same or higher for them.**”

– *Master's in French Studies*

“There were times when **I cried in the grocery store** because everything except for beans and rice was over budget.”

– *Anonymous*

“I barely have enough to get by. This **prevents me from going to the doctor and accessing counseling services.**”

– *Anonymous*

“**I did not go to the doctor multiple times** when I needed it my first two years of school because I could not afford to go even with insurance.”

– *PhD in Physics*

**“The stipend is too low for the cost of living in the DMV. In order to live above the poverty line a second job is needed.**

Working full time and being a full time student is challenging and wouldn't be necessary if the stipends were increased to liveable wages.”

—PhD in Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy

**“Financially, I am incredibly stressed. I work 3 jobs outside of my school work and GA/TA-ships to make ends meet.”**

— *Anonymous*

“[Because of my gender], I constantly am talked over in research spaces. I am never given the same level of training as my peers nor the same level of help.”

— *Anonymous*

“[T]he processes used to determine an appropriate graduate student stipend at UMD are outdated and do not facilitate accessibility or diversity among the student population. [...] First generation college students, minority students, and students who don't come from [...] higher SES backgrounds will continue to struggle with the decision to attend and stay in graduate school with the amount that we make.”

— *Anonymous*

# Legislation on Collective Bargaining

# Current Status

Awaiting a vote in the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriations Committee

- This is where the bill has failed in the past. We are continuing to put pressure on legislators to hold a vote on the bill.
- We are confident that, if a vote were held, the bill would pass both the committee and the floor of both chambers.

# Why We Need Your Help

There two reasons why legislators are hesitant to legalize collective bargaining

- There is no political incentive to care about graduate students
- The University System opposes us

With Faculty on board, we can solve both of those problems

- It makes it clear that there are people besides grad students who support the bill
- It makes it clear that the University System is speaking only for management, not for those who are doing the work central to the mission of the university



# What You Can Do

Spread our message with other grad students in your departments and at your university.

Contact your legislators, organize on your campus, pass resolutions supporting the graduate assistants the University System relies on.