



December 4, 2018

Dear Chancellor Green and Executive Vice Chancellor Plowman,

As the Graduate Student Assembly of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we wish to convey to you our deep concerns with the inadequacy of many graduate students' stipends.

While graduate student stipends are intended to provide a modest monthly income that allows graduate students to pursue advanced study, no graduate student should live in poverty. We understand that graduate school is a career stepping-stone, but we assert that it is not out of line for UNL's current and prospective graduate students to expect the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide them with a livable income. We also understand that the purpose of a graduate student stipend is to allow one adult to live frugally—none of us entered graduate school with delusions about our earning potential during our graduate careers.

While we understand that graduate school is a transitional phase, we write to assert that many of our graduate stipends are far too low to allow one adult to live safely and independently in Lincoln. According to a report by the Lincoln Housing Authority (LHA) in 2017, a family size of 1 that makes less than \$15,150 per year is considered extremely low income. While there is large variation in graduate student stipends across departments and colleges, scores of the students we represent earn stipends of \$10,000. Many more of us receive stipends of \$12,000 and \$14,000, placing us well within the LHA's extremely low-income designation. Further, many graduate students are not guaranteed summer funding by their departments, meaning that they must make these sums last over twelve months, not the ten for which they are intended. Even if we can manage to make ends meet, we deserve much better.

We write not only to assert that our stipends are too low to fulfill the purpose for which they are designed, but to give you perspectives on the deep human costs that graduate students bear as a result. We have had months of conversations with graduate students about this issue: we have received countless stories via e-mail, and, most recently, held a listening session with graduate students from a wide range of disciplines. We received scores of disturbing reports regarding the human toll of UNL's low graduate student stipends. We represent graduate students who have stayed in abusive relationships because their stipend did not give them adequate income to cover the financial costs of leaving their partners. We represent departments for whom going to the Huskers Helping Huskers pantry has become a social activity. We represent countless graduate students

who routinely forgo vital health care because their monthly take-home pay is not adequate to cover co-pay costs.

It is imperative that you understand that the experiences listed above are the tip of the iceberg. These are not isolated cases—there is not one member of our assembly who does not know a graduate student whose life has been deeply and negatively affected by the inadequacy of their stipend; many of us have suffered ourselves. Based on the information above, we request that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln raise the floor for graduate stipends across the university to ensure that every single graduate student is paid a stipend that allows them to support themselves—living modestly, but not in poverty—for a year.

We suggest that \$25,000 over ten months would be an effective floor for all graduate student stipends at UNL. We make this request based on our estimate of how much it costs for a single adult to support themselves in Lincoln in 2018. A full breakdown of this estimate comes with this letter. We assert that it is absolutely impossible for a single adult to survive in Lincoln on an income of less than \$960 per month, that this sum is an absolute minimum that takes into account no unanticipated expenses, and that many graduate students' post-tax annual income is below this bar. Moreover, we assert that a graduate student living modestly could easily require \$1,595 per month depending on their particular needs. Crucially, these estimations do not take into account the \$1,021.20 annually that graduate students pay in student fees, and they do not allow for any money spent towards research, scholarly activity, or career development.

We understand that this is a substantial request, especially given the issues surrounding the University's budget. Still, it is vital that you understand the scale of this request is grounded in the cost of living in Lincoln and is proportional to the severity of the current situation. Further, we assert that a \$25,000 minimum stipend is commensurate to what graduate students currently contribute to UNL.

We know that this letter constitutes one step in a longer conversation. To that end, we request that you both hold a meeting with GSA leaders to discuss this issue and the steps we can take in addressing it together.

Thank you very much for your attention to this issue. We know that addressing this problem will require serious consideration and very tough choices on your parts, and we have high hopes for your leadership here.

Please contact us at gsa@unl.edu if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

The UNL ASUN-Graduate Student Assembly

Appendix. Estimates of Cost of Living in Lincoln

To calculate the cost of living in Lincoln for a single graduate student, we first considered necessary monthly expenses, summarized in Table 1. We then considered annual or semi-annual expenses that most graduate students at UNL incur or are required by the university to pay. These are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1. Typical monthly expenses for a graduate student living in Lincoln

Item	Expense	Recurrence	Total Annual Expenditure
Rent for a one-bedroom apartment	\$500-\$800	12	\$6,000-\$9,600
Monthly food	\$300-\$500	12	\$3,600-\$6,000
Utilities (electric and heat)	\$40-\$80	12	\$480-\$960
Phone service	\$55-\$100	12	\$660-\$1200
Internet	\$45-\$70	12	\$540-\$840
Car insurance	\$15-\$45	12	\$180-\$540
TOTAL			\$10,974-\$19,140

A key caveat about the minimum prices in Table 1 is that they represent the lowest prices we are aware it is possible to pay for each of these expenses. If a graduate student spends more than the minimum on any of these expenses per month, it is not due to lack of frugality.

Table 2. Typical or required semi-annual expenses for UNL graduate students

Item	Expense	Recurrence	Total Annual Expenditure
Fall Health Insurance ¹	\$661.76	1	\$661.76
Spring Health Insurance	\$916.96	1	\$916.96
Student Fees ²	\$510.60	2	\$1021.20
Parking pass	\$207-\$700	1	\$207-\$700
TOTAL			\$2,806.92-\$3,299.92

¹ According to the Graduate Studies website (<https://health.unl.edu/studentinsurance>), the student premiums are \$1,067.36 for the fall semester and \$1,478.96 for the spring and summer. UNL's policy is to

² This estimate is drawn from the student fee breakdown on ASUN's website: <https://asun.unl.edu/fee-breakdown>.